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THE OLD MAN AND THE YOUNG GIRL



J
SOWING AND REAPING;

OR,

WHAT WILL COME OF IT.

BY MARY HOWITT.

**AUTHOR OF "STRIVE AND THRIVE," "HOPE ON! HOPE EVER!"
ETC. ETC.**

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SOWING AND REAPING;

OR,

WHAT WILL COME OF IT.

CHAPTER I.

A CHARACTER.

SIXTY years ago, a tall, gloomy house, of a very dingy, unpromising aspect, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, was inhabited by Thomas Durant, one of the most sagacious lawyers of the day.

By birth he was a gentleman, the younger son of the Durants of Stanton-Combe, an old, though decayed family, in the county of Durham. The family estate was greatly encumbered by debts and mortgages, and, owing to the sudden death of his father, he was left unprovided for. Edward, the elder son, took all, excepting the mother's jointure of three thousand pounds. The younger son was penniless; and, as if to increase his difficulties, had been bred to no profession.

In talents and temper the young men were as different as in fortune. The elder brother was of weak mind, and with that pliant, easy temper

which is frequently its accompaniment ; the younger was active and enterprising in mind, subtle in intellect, and by temper, resentful and implacable. He seemed naturally made to rule, and the other to submit ; and such might have been their fate, had not the elder, to the amazement of every one, when the period of mourning for the father had just passed, brought home a bride—a haughty country beauty, without fortune, but impatient of any restraint, and perfectly capable, and very willing, to take the place of governor.

The first act of her supremacy was to hint that the absence of the mother was desired by her, and that her jointure was sufficient for a widow to live retiredly upon ; and, furthermore, that it was her will that the brother should choose his profession ; to enable him to do which, she presented him with a few hundred pounds. To live upon her jointure is what a widow looks forward to, therefore the mother said little : she acquiesced patiently. Not so the younger son. He flung back the money with ineffable disdain, and vowed to raise himself to wealth and power by his own unassisted efforts ; assuring his sister-in-law, at the same time, that she should live to repent the day in which she forced him thus from the home of his ancestors. It is, as everybody knows, the commonest thing in the world for angry people to utter threats ; therefore, when Mr. Thomas Durant said further, that his children should live under that roof when hers were beggars, she only laughed, and thought no more of it.

Thomas Durant went straight to London, and commenced his career by writing for lawyers. To London his mother followed him, and besought him earnestly to share the home she was still enabled to enjoy. He, however, was of that resolute temper which, when once fairly in the strife against difficulty, has a pride in the combat : he repulsed every offer of assistance, and even every expression of sympathy. The mother, nevertheless, established herself near him, and, unable to force assistance upon him, or to wring from him either affection or complaint, satisfied herself by knowing that he was not only alive, but able to keep himself above want. What, therefore, he would not receive from her in her lifetime, she resolved to accumulate for him at her death ; and she lived long enough, practising every possible self-denial, for accumulation to become the pleasure of her life. She lived a female miser, and at her death bequeathed him near five thousand pounds. With this sum he took chambers, and commenced the study of the law, under more prosperous circumstances than he had known before.

It would be needless to go through the succession of years in which he worked his upward way in society, extending his personal ambition as he acquired reputation in his profession.

In his fortieth year he married, and his marriage was one of those riddles which now and then occur in social life, and would defy an Edipus to solve. His wife was a fair young creature with a few thousands to her fortune,

who married, as many another woman marries, for a home, and purchased, in so doing, certain misery for herself. She, and one sister, were the children of a gentleman who died young in India. They were brought up by one of Mr. Durant's clients, in whose house he first made his wife's acquaintance. In two years' time the other sister married also, but both marriages were unfortunate; the sister's husband dying in the West Indies, of the yellow fever, within the first twelve months of their marriage. The only consolation in Mrs. Durant's case was, that her unhappiness was of short duration. In three years' time Mr. Thomas Durant was left a widower, with a little son. The first evidences of human kindness were given towards this child; and it is but justice to the father to say, that every possible care was taken of his early youth. The first eight years of his life were passed in the country, under the most experienced and judicious care. When his father brought him home, it seemed requisite to have some superior female in the family, who might undertake the charge of the child, and also make the home more comfortable for his sake.

Mr. Thomas Durant looked round upon his female acquaintance to find such a one as he required; the choice seemed as difficult to make as if matrimony had again been his object. At length he bethought himself of his late wife's sister. He had proved the meekness and patience of his wife's temper; he had seen enough of her sister to believe she was not dissimilar; besides this, she had been unfortunate. When she lost her

husband she lost also the bulk of her property, and was reduced now to a meagre income, in the midst of heartless relations, whom he knew would but little relish having to contribute to her support. She would not be over nice, nay, he thought she would be humbly thankful, to have a home offered to her. He was right. Some things the widow wished different; but, wearing weeds for her husband, a little daughter to provide for, and relations, cold-visaged as creditors, around her, she scarcely hesitated. Besides, her sister's child was dear to her, and for his sake she was willing to concede many things. Beyond all this, Mr. Thomas Durant offered a remuneration which would not only make her independent, but enable her to make yearly savings. Mrs. Franklin, however, for such was her name, was decided at that moment by a letter she received from one of her kinsfolk, a cold prudential man, who had been solicited by a third party, unknown to her, for assistance. She undertook the charge of her brother-in-law's family on one condition, that her little daughter resided with her. Mr. Thomas Durant thought, as the child was a girl, she would be easily managed, and as she grew up might be useful in the house—perhaps save the wages of a female servant; and he consented.

It was, as we have said, a dreary house in which he lived; but his hard, habitually cold manners, were even more dreary and discouraging than his habitation. Still he had the power of assuming a smile to strangers, with a plausibility of manner, and smoothness of voice, that made

many a one say he was not as bad as his character. But to those from whom he had nothing to gain, or whom he wished to keep at a distance, the insensibility of his eye, and the cold indifference of his voice, was chilling as possible; nay, he absolutely seemed to shut his senses from such, as if he could neither hear nor see them, nor could they become palpable to him.

Towards Mrs. Franklin his manners were as cold as they could be, within the verge of civility. Still he permitted her to make some little alteration in his domestic establishment, and by degrees the general aspect of the place was made more cheerful and comfortable. His own tastes and desires in return were studied and gratified. His chair was placed to an inch where he liked it best his slippers and gown were ready for him before he called for them; but he repaid none of these little attentions either by a gratified look, or an acknowledgment of satisfaction; he was aware of them, however, and found the comfort of them, and if they had been withheld he would have resented it. He was one of the unamiable, with whom there can be no interchange of good offices.

To Alice, Mrs. Franklin's daughter, it was not known that he had ever spoken a word. His manners had repelled her as a child. She sat with him and her mother at meals; she accompanied them in his coach twice every Sunday to church; for he made great profession of religion, was a regular attendant on its ordinances, and rigorously required the same from all those about him. She had sat with him in his pew, and, as

she grew up, had taken the sacrament at the same time with himself, yet he no more appeared to see her than if he had been blind. To him she was a nonentity—at least seemed so. She tried to persuade herself that he had forgotten her. She wished she could forget him, for his presence acted like a torpedo to her spirit.

Thus years went on; and Mr. Thomas Durant's professional prospects became brighter and brighter; and almost to his own surprise he found himself one of the first lawyers in London. The fairest honours of the profession lay before him. He was honoured by the Crown with a baronetcy, and was, it was expected, in the direct road to the bench.

Of Sir Thomas Durant's son we have but little at present to say.* At twenty he promised, in process of time, to make a lawyer as sagacious as his father; for no expense had been spared in his professional education, and at that age he left home for three years' travel and study on the continent.

Sir Thomas Durant, full of schemes for his own advantage, always suspected others of the same thing. We will open our next chapter with a proof of this fact.

* The reader will become acquainted with him, as well as with some of our other characters, more fully, in the second part of this story.

CHAPTER II.

A REMOVAL.

"SISTER FRANKLIN," said Sir Thomas Durant, settling himself one evening in his easy chair; "Sister Franklin, your daughter is a very pretty young woman."

There were two things in these few words that terrified Mrs. Franklin—the subject of them, and the kindness of his address: they could portend no good.

"Your daughter is a well-grown, and passingly handsome young woman, sister Franklin. What is her name?"

"Alice," replied she.

"A good name too," remarked he. "I used to be partial to the name of Alice. But I know not, sister Franklin, why she should avoid me."

"She is timid," replied she; "but I am glad you like her."

"Oh! no, no!" said he, "I have no particular reason to like her."

"I beg your pardon," observed the mother; "I misunderstood you."

"No offence, at all, sister Franklin. The girl, I say, is modest—has a neat way of walking. I used to think a deal of a woman's gait. She is modest, too: how old may she be?"

"Eighteen, last January," replied her mother.

"Eighteen!" returned he; "upon my word, and a fine young woman too. You are looking

out for a husband, I suppose?" and Sir Thomas smiled.

Mrs. Franklin laid down her work and looked at him, wondering what all this tended to.

"You are thinking of getting her married," replied he.

"My good sir," said she, "how can you be so absurd?"

"Absurd!" he replied; "pray, Mrs. Franklin, what was your sister's age when I married her."

"Eighteen," replied she, and again took up her work.

"But sister Franklin," continued he, after a 'few moments' pause, "I am serious about your daughter; young women are never so well off as when they are married; do you deny that?"

"By no means," was her reply. "A woman's greatest happiness is to be well married—but to be *well* married implies a great deal, Sir Thomas."

"A fine young fellow, with seven or eight hundred a-year, you would call a good match for your daughter."

"As far as money went," replied Mrs. Franklin; "but I consider other qualifications even more important than money."

"And pray," asked he, "what other qualifications might you require?"

"High moral principle," said she, "a deep sense of religion; and I should like to know what had been his conduct as a son and a brother. A man's character, or a woman's either, is only truly known at home."

"Humph!" said Sir Thomas, and then, after a

pause, he added, "I should not object to give your daughter a couple of hundreds or so, to buy wedding-clothes."

Mrs. Franklin looked him full in the face, for she was greatly surprised.

"I would not object, I say, to furnish her wardrobe, provided she married to please me. You would trust me, sister Franklin, to choose her a husband?"

Mrs. Franklin could not divine his meaning; he could not intend to recommend his own son. She was puzzled. "I owe you, Sir Thomas," she said, "my sincerest thanks; but, indeed, I have no thought of marrying my daughter at present."

"Then pray, Mrs. Franklin," asked he, "what do you mean to do with her?"

"Upon my word," she replied, "I had no thought but of her remaining with me as heretofore. Am I to understand that you do not wish it?"

"To be sure not!" was the reply.

"Will you explain yourself fully?" said Mrs. Franklin.

"Am I, Mrs. Franklin," said he, in great anger, "to keep a girl in my house who will be plotting and scheming how she may marry my son? I want my son at home," he added, "but, so long as that girl is in the house, he shall not enter it!"

"I will answer for it," said the mother, "that she will not entertain such an idea."

'She *will*!' replied he, raising his voice in

extreme anger ; “ and I tell you, once for all, Mrs. Franklin, that my son shall not return while that girl is in the house ! ”

“ But,” replied she, “ if my daughter goes, I go also.”

“ Sister Franklin,” resumed Sir Thomas, in a voice of the most oily placidity, “ you are over hasty—it is the way with women. I would fain see your daughter well married.”

“ My daughter,” returned she, “ will not marry at present.”

“ Again, my dear madam,” said he, “ you are over hasty. You know Mr. Sharple—my friend as I may say—Mr. Anthony Sharple ? ”

Mrs. Franklin lifted up her hand involuntarily, and made no reply ; and Sir Thomas went on—“ Mr. Sharple is an excellent, and an amazingly clever young man.”

“ Young ! ” said she ; “ Mr. Sharple must be forty at least ; my daughter is but eighteen.”

“ Mr. Sharple,” pursued Sir Thomas, without noticing her observation, “ is not as disagreeable to your daughter as I am. She gives him her company occasionally, Mrs. Franklin.”

“ Such a thing shall never be ! ” exclaimed she, with indignation ; “ my daughter shall maintain herself by her own hard labour—shall die unmarried, before I will sacrifice her to that man ! ”

“ Hoity, toity ! ” interrupted he ; “ for what shall she not marry Mr. Sharple ? ”

“ Mr Sharple,” replied she, with perfect calmness, “ is a man for whom I entertain utter con-

tempt. He is a sharper in practice, a libertine in morals, an infidel in religion!"

Sir Thomas grew pale with anger. "I know what you aim at," said he, between his teeth. "I understand you; and I know too what that meek-faced girl aims at! Out of my house, and see what beggary will bring you to!"

"Sir Thomas," said Mrs. Franklin, with an unruffled voice, "we will go!"

"Begone!" returned he, striking his fist on the table.

Sir Thomas Durant had quite overshot his mark; for to part with Mrs. Franklin, his well-managing house-keeper, was the last thought he would have had. But it was too late to undo what was done; and the mother and daughter left the house that very night, and were received with kind welcome under the roof of a humble friend. Here, however, they did not remain many days. But we must be permitted a momentary digression.

In a small house at Richmond, with one man and maid servant, lived Mr. Nehemiah Netley, a retired tradesman. He was a remarkably small man, and had been a dealer in gloves, ribbons, lace, and ladies' bonnets, and was as dapper and precise in his person as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox. He had a pink complexion, and hair perfectly white; was the uncle of Mrs. Franklin, and an old bachelor, of course.

Mr. Netley was not more singular in appearance than in opinion, always contriving to think differ-

ently to everybody else. How, or whether, he had maintained the integrity of his opinions with equal pertinacity when he had a multitude of fair customers to please, we know not; perhaps he was now indemnifying himself for former self-denial. However that might be, he had quarrelled with a large circle of nephews and nieces, and first and second cousins; yet for all this he neglected none of them, but looked in upon all of them occasionally, as he passed their doors in his walks; though he declared he liked none of them.

When his nephew, the husband of Mrs. Franklin, died of the yellow fever, he persisted that he must have been imprudent; when her relations talked of assisting the widow and her child, he opposed the project, saying, "they had much better assist themselves." When everybody censured Mrs. Franklin for managing the establishment of Sir Thomas Durant, he said she had done right; and yet when he met her he upbraided her for so doing. Accordingly, when he heard, one morning, at the house of one of his nieces, that she had suddenly left, and was now without a home, nor would, said they, ever get the arrears of money Sir Thomas owed her, he called them "a set of cold-hearted wretches," and said "she was worth them all put together!" and as he repeated this to himself for the fourth time, he tripped lightly out of the house, and walked more briskly than common on his way home.

That same evening a hackney coach stopped at the house where Mrs. Franklin and her daughter

were then staying, and Mr. Netley, scarcely treading heavier than a child, entered the room where they sate.

"Cousin Franklin," he began, without further salutation, "you see what you have brought yourself to by looking for wheaten loaves on a burdock-bush!"

"I am not surprised by my situation," said she.

"But you *ought* to be surprised," returned he, "I should have been much better pleased if you had been surprised, for then you would have been deceived, and I should have pitied you! And pray what do you mean to do now?"

"As yet I have not decided," she said.

"And so this is your daughter," said he, looking towards Alice; "pray, whom may you reckon her like?"

"I think her like what her poor, dear father was," returned Mrs. Franklin, with a sigh.

"Nonsense!" said the old man, "not a bit. He was a dark man—black hair, and dark eyes; she is very like me!"

Alice coloured to the roots of her hair, and certainly increased the likeness, if there were any, and her mother smiled.

"Well, you know, Mrs. Franklin," again began Mr. Netley, after a minute's pause, "at least a woman of your good sense ought to know, that everybody should maintain themselves;—you need not answer;—and that they should be as little chargeable to their acquaintances as may be."

"Mrs. Franklin looked distressed, and the old gentleman continued—"I don't often invite my

relations to my house—it is a bad habit—but still I choose to invite you. I can find you something to do.”

Mrs. Franklin felt, that under her relation's pertinacity there was kindness, and she accepted his invitation. They were soon, therefore, established at Richmond; and Alice found, that under his roof she could give way to the buoyant gladness of her heart without dread. The spring-time of her life seemed now to have come; and while she diffused gladness through the quiet house, she every day became more dear to its master.

Before we close this chapter we must say a word or two respecting Mr. Anthony Sharple. He was the son of a John Sharple, who held the stewardship of Stanton-Combe, in the days of Sir Thomas's father. When the masculine and managing lady, who had dismissed Sir Thomas, took upon herself the conduct of affairs, she and her steward quarrelled. He made his complaint to the exiled brother in London, who advised him to send his son to London to study law, and to go himself back to Stanton-Combe, and humble himself to the reigning powers. He did so, and was reinstated; maintaining, unknown to his mistress, a good understanding ever after with Sir Thomas. In process of time he died, but no second steward filled his place, and his son Anthony, then a growing solicitor in London, was made legal adviser and confidant of the lady of Stanton-Combe. He was the devoted creature of his patron, and not only by possessing the con-

fidence of Mrs. Durant, but through his yearly visits to the hall, could impart to Sir Thomas whatever information he required. We shall see hereafter how the colleaguings of these two affected the interests of the family at Stanton-Combe.

Such was the Anthony Sharple whom Sir Thomas Durant designed for the husband of the fair Alice Franklin.

CHAPTER III.

STANTON-COMBE AND ITS INHABITANTS.

THE house and manor of Stanton-Combe had been in the family of the Durants from the time of the seventh Henry. The acme of the family splendour was in the reign of William and Mary, when a marriage with a rich city heiress enabled the then possessor, Richard, to assume a greater style of living. The pictures of all the family, by Sir Godfrey Kneller and Wissing, bore testimony to the liberal expenditure of the house, as well from the value of the paintings themselves, as from the splendour of the dress and jewels both of men and women. Many were the traditions of the honour and glory of those days, which descended like rays of light through the darker times that succeeded.

From those splendid days, in which it was said that the very stone balustrades of the garden-terrace were gilded—no sign of good taste certainly—the troubles and embarrassments of the house commenced. The city heiress left five sons

and nine daughters to be provided for; three of whom marrying into noble families of small estate, were a drain upon the parent-wealth; while all the others, living to a good old age, kept up, as annuitants, an inexhaustible claim. At the end of that generation they were but little the better for the two hundred thousand pounds of the fair Kitty Perkins; nay, they were so much the worse, for they had acquired habits of expensive living. From that time each succeeding generation found itself in narrower and narrower circumstances. The family lived upon the glory that had been. The furniture of the house grew dimmer and dimmer; the family jewels fewer and fewer; woods were felled, and farms sold, till at length nothing remained which was not strictly entailed—the house itself, and the home farm—and even upon this, the father of Edward and Thomas Durant had taken up money. It was said that his embarrassed circumstances shortened his days.

Edward Durant, as we have said, married a domineering, high-spirited dame. She had been the tyrant of her father's house; and the mild, pliant temper of her husband yielded to her without a struggle. The first six months of her wedlock left her undivided sovereign over house and land, man-servant and maid-servant, ox and ass, and everything that the place contained. Her husband wept when his mother and brother were so summarily dismissed; but he kept his tears from his wife's knowledge. He also sent sundry presents of game and fish to them in London, for

these were things he could obtain with his own hand. They were always unacknowledged, it is true, but his kind heart was not discouraged, and at length he unfortunately ventured to put in a turkey also. In three weeks' time this hamper was returned with its unaccepted contents, and a large amount of carriage to pay. Mrs. Durant thus discovered her husband's offence—and more, that the favourite turkey, which was supposed to have been worried, had been offered to his brother, and was now sent back with a cost of ten shillings! Poor man! he never sent turkeys and game again to London.

Mrs. Durant was not only masculine in her temper, but in her tastes and manners also. She could rein in a fiery horse whose mettle defied the skill of a groom; she saddled her own steed, and mounted it with the agility of a man, and scoured over the country in the chase, or on business, with a speed and horsemanship that equalled the most experienced riders of the other sex. She invariably drove the carriage in which her husband rode, after the first two months of their marriage; for at that time, as they were passing one evening through a wood, they were beset by robbers, and he, it was said, prayed her to take the reins. The lady fired off her pistols, reloaded them in an instant, did as he desired her, and never afterwards resigned the reins into his hands; he, good, easy man, sitting by her side, willingly committing himself to the guidance of an arm as strong as his own, and to a mind much stronger. The carriage, however, soon ceased to be used at

all; horseback was much more suited to the lady's taste, and Mr. Durant himself walked on foot. The style of Mrs. Durant's person was in perfect accordance with her habits; somewhat above the middle-size, with considerable pretensions to beauty, even when her youth was passed. Her features were masculine, but finely formed; dark, keen eyes; a mouth indicative of strong character, with teeth rather large, but beautifully white and regular; a clear, but dark complexion, well-pencilled brows, and hair black and glossy as the wing of the eagle. She was unquestionably a fine woman. Her dress was peculiar, but in character: she wore her hair confined in a black silk net, with short ringlets on her temples, small gold rings in her ears, to which, when in high costume, were suspended immense gold pendants; invariably a blue riding-habit, worn at home of a walking length. When she went out, she merely added a long blue cloth riding-skirt, with a black beaver hat, belted with a gold buckle, to which, when intending to make a better appearance than ordinary, she added a small black feather. Her feet were invariably cased in strong leather boots and she was known, the whole country over, as "Jack Durant."

Of course, such a person as we have described her to be, did not hold much intercourse with the ladies of her neighbourhood; they regarded her as hardly respectable; while she thought of them as inferior creatures—a kind of dolls of larger growth. She had, however, one female friend,

the widow of Sir Sampson Thicknise, of Starkey, in Northumberland. Lady Thicknise was a stout, stately, and most important personage, whose husband, a vehement fox-hunter, had been, in his life-time, a great admirer of Mrs. Durant and her spirited horsemanship. About the time of her marriage, Sir Sampson was thrown from his horse in a steeple-chase, and broke his neck. He left no children, and the estate would have passed to a collateral branch, had not Lady Thicknise, who reckoned herself skilled in law, and was deep-read in wills, deeds, and settlements, luckily discovered certain flaws in some deed or title, by which she held the next heir *in terrorem*, and purchased, by her silence, possession of the estate during her life. Such was Mrs. Durant's sole female friend.

A very different person to her was the smally portioned maiden sister of Sir Sampson, Mrs. Betty Thicknise, several years the senior both of her brother and sister-in-law. Where Lady Thicknise wore lace, Mrs. Betty wore lawn. The satins, and gold and silver brocades of Lady Thicknise, were tabinets and ducapes with Mrs. Betty: Mrs. Betty arranged the dinners which the other ate, and got up her lace ruffles, and made up her lace caps: Mrs. Betty visited the poor—Lady Thicknise gave away beef at Christmas: Mrs. Betty read her Bible in her closet, and Lady Thicknise always kept hers open on a stand beside her: Lady Thicknise was the dear friend and honoured confident and councillor of

Mrs. Durant; Mrs. Betty was the respected acquaintance of Mrs. Durant's husband. That alone implied a great difference.

For many years Mrs. Durant did not seem likely to become the mother of a living child; an event which, unmatronly as were her temper and character, caused her much grief. At length, however, a son was born, who, unlike his little predecessors, came to live. Many were the letters which the lady of Starkey wrote on this occasion, and abundantly splendid were the offerings of silver panakin, boat, and spoon for the child, and a silver-gilt caudle-cup for the mother. Lady Thickenisse was, of course, solicited to be god-mother; and accordingly she came in her heavy coach-and-four, bringing with her the christening cap of point-lace, and the mantle of white satin sprigged with silver, together with a hundred pounds, in an embroidered purse, which was put into the child's little hands with his god-mother's blessing. It was a grand christening. Such a christening-feast as that had never been held at Stanton-Combe before—not even in the days of Kitty Perkins and her fourteen children. The boy was named Richard, after that fortunate ancestor; and when the god-mother had showered her bounty on priest and nurse likewise, she departed, in her heavy coach-and-four, leaving a long and bright memory, like a streaming glory, behind her.

Mrs. Durant's heart was capable of the most intense affection, as was proved by her love, and her unwearied care and attention to the child. Nothing less than such care as she bestowed upon

him could have kept him alive; for the first many months of his existence were marked by extreme feebleness. Night and day she watched over him, getting such snatches of sleep as she could, and seeming incapable of fatigue while caring for this beloved being. Her affection was like the animal passion for its young—an absorbing sentiment; and she, who beforetime had appeared the most unfeminine of women, showed tenderness and patience, and such unwearying devotion, as more gentle or sentimental mothers could form no idea of. As months went on, and the little creature began to outgrow the early debility of his constitution, his mother resumed her former occupations—making everything, however, subservient to this master affection; and she might be seen looking after her grooms, or her dogs, with the child in her arms. His education began early; he was indulged in every wish, and whoever had dared to cross his desires or temper, would have received the severest reproofs from his mother. He grew strong, and hale, and rosy; and before he could walk he learned to ride. His mother carried him on horseback before her, and he sat on her knee when she drove. He was the idol of her soul. People wondered that she had so faithfully enacted the nurse; but had he required ten times the care, ten times the anxiety, she would have been capable of all. Well indeed did she think herself repaid as the brave little fellow, at two years old, followed her about with the dogs; and though at four he was wild and wilful, and unmanageable as an unbroken colt, she saw

in it nothing but evidence of a fine manly spirit. Whatever he did was right in her eyes.

At six years old they might be met on their morning's ride, twenty miles from home, he on his little horse, booted and spurred, belted, and clad in scarlet, the most accomplished of little horsemen in three counties. It would have been also impossible to have found a child more attractive in appearance than he. His complexion glowed with life, health, and buoyant spirits; his eyes sparkled; and his long, curling, dark hair, which, according to the fashion of the time, was worn long, fell on his shoulders. Wherever he went, admiring eyes followed him, filling the heart of his mother with undisguised pride.

At ten, his mother had him no longer under control; and in order to obtain the slightest submission, she resorted to bribes and flattery. He should have the pony, for which he had been teasing her, if he would learn his lessons; he should have the gilt spurs, if he would go to church; or he should go to the races, if he would give up some fancy, injurious or inconvenient, no doubt, upon which he was bent. Thus he soon learned to take advantage of his mother's affection, and every duty was soon bargained for by him.

But we have gone on too fast. We must return now to the time when Dick was three years old. At that time Mrs. Durant became the mother of another child—a daughter. Had it been a boy, she could not have had the same affection for it as for the elder; but for a girl she had almost a contempt. The infant was given over to the care

of its nurse ; but the heart of the father yearned towards this little neglected one. He visited her nursery daily ; took her in his arms ; hushed her to sleep, and placed her tenderly in her cradle. When her mother had been asked, at the time of baptism, what name she wished the child to bear, she answered carelessly, that it was indifferent to her. Her father, therefore, who in his own mind fixed upon his friend Mrs. Betty Thicknise for the god-mother, suggested her name, and she was baptized Elizabeth.

Mrs. Betty was no traveller, and yet on this interesting occasion she came to Stanton-Combe. She could not command a coach-and-four ; she therefore came riding double—it was a common style then, even for a gentlewoman—behind an ancient serving-man. Her offerings to the child she brought in a curiously carved ivory box, an old heir-loom, which she carried on her knee ; a delicate cap of her own needlework ; a cambric cloak trimmed with fine old lace—it was fortunately summer—and a pair of diamond ear-rings. Besides these was a small packet, which the good lady seemed to think the most important of all ; it contained a penny loaf, a hard-boiled egg, and a bunch of matches. These she placed upon the lap of the child, making her receive each separately into her little hands, and with each she gave a kiss and a blessing, with the wish that she might never know the want of bread, have gold and silver in plenty, and make a happy marriage.

Mrs. Betty Thicknise was greatly pleased with her god-child, and Mr. Durant was the most at-

tentive of hosts. She pronounced her visit, at parting, to have been one of unmixed satisfaction, and Mr. Durant himself escorted her the first stages of her homeward journey.

Although there was neither pomp nor ceremony about the birth or christening of the little Eliza-both, her infancy was not neglected. In the same degree in which the mother gave up her whole soul to her son, the weak-minded but amiable father took his younger child to his bosom, and she became to him more than a daughter. It was a pleasant thing to see the old man—for age had come upon him before his years—directing the steps of the little fairy along the garden-paths, gathering flowers for her, showing her birds and butterflies, making her familiar with the beautiful tints of skies and leaves, and pouring into her spirit all the sweetness, and purity, and freshness of nature. In return, she gave him the most entire affection; and if the childhood of the little Elizabeth was less animated and varied than that of her brother, it was not less happy. Yet the children were never playfellows—at least soon ceased to be so; for Dick's animal spirits were so vehement that his sport was like that of a young lion, and his sister was saluted with kicks and cuffs, bites and scratches. His tokens of goodwill were such as he bestowed upon his young dogs; but then his sister, unlike a dog, could not bark and bite again, and her cries for help only brought down upon her the contemptuous anger of her mother, who, with upbraidings for her

cowardice and feebleness, sent he off to **keep** company with her father. Children, we know, are imitative creatures; and the boy not only imitated his mother's indifference, but saw fine diversion in the little girl's terror, and very soon menaced her with a doubled fist and a wag of the head, whenever they chanced to meet; and this, as the best means of defence, she took care should be as seldom as possible

As she grew up, her father taught her to read and write, and, in fact, imparted to her all the knowledge needful for her years. He no longer seemed melancholy and forlorn; his heart was sustained by the affectionate duty of this beloved child, who never was absent from his mind. "I must tell Lizzy this," or, "show her that," was his perpetual thought, and a kind smile or greeting always welcomed her back to his side. Poor old man! he was one of those with whom small pleasures, and trivial wants, make up the sum of life; an affectionate child was his fittest companion. She combed out his long white locks every day, for that was one of his quiet luxuries; she presented his night-cap for his after-dinner nap; and then always awaited his waking with his cup of chocolate and the newspaper in her hand. "Bless you, my dear," was his invariable acknowledgment, "but I wish you a better office!"

Many were the traditions both of his own family, and of the country round, with which the innocent old man's memory was stored, and

nothing gave him greater pleasure than to relate them over and over to his daughter; and many a winter's day would they go slowly through the stately half-shut-up rooms of the mansion, that he might relate the histories of the ancestors whose portraits hung on the walls. This was the viscount, the great man of the family, who fought in the thirty years' war, and was honoured by Elizabeth of Bohemia, from whom he received a valuable ring. "I will ask your mother to show it you, if she is not tired, to-night," he would say. Here was the the portrait of old Madam Durant, of whom such wonderful stories were current; she was skilled in the black art, and had a brownie in her service, who spun at night, when the family was in bed, all that fine old linen which was contained in a certain carved chest, and with which, it was believed, the fortunes of the house were woven. As long as that web lasted, the family fortunes were not to decay: "for this reason," said he to his little daughter, "that damask is never worn: we will ask your mother for the key; for it is mighty curious linen."

Many a time, too, while his wife and son were careering over the country at the head of the hunt, or were betting at races, or attending a horse-fair, Elizabeth and her father were wandering away into the far-off fields, through woods, and by old wells, tracing out again the same legendary histories. Here was the Hunter's Linn, where the young heir of a noble house had perished in the fog, of a November day, when he had gone forth

With his good hound the deer to follow;
The large red deer at break of day,
O'er many a moss and moerland hollow.

And here too was the Lady's Well, of which also
spoke its particular legend:—

White as is the white hoar frost,
And white as is the snow,
The lady from the water clear
At full moon rises slow;
And she who sees her smiling face,
Shall happy pass through life;
But she who sees her when she weeps
Shall be a weeping wife.

“And is it true, father?” the little girl would inquire.

“Oh yes; no doubt of it!” the good old man would say, for he himself believed it. “When I was a boy it was a regular thing for young maidens to watch the well. I have heard of many a one who has seen her. But I would not, Lizzy love, that you ever watched; it is a sort of mistrusting of Providence.”

“No, father,” she would reply; “and besides it is a dismal place.”

Then again, they would ascend some particular eminence.

“From this spot,” said he one day, pointing all round over a fair, broad landscape of green hills and wooded hollows, “may be seen what once was the inheritance of our house: a horseman, well mounted, on a summer's day might have ridden round it.”

“But what is the grey hall among yon woods?” asked she.

“That hall, with its seven farms,” replied the father, “came into our house with the heiress of Denning Fells: her wedding-dress was worth as many merks as she had acres.”

“And yon ruined square tower?” asked Elizabeth.

“That mass of old masonry,” replied he, “was the dwelling of John of Hartlebury, the great rival of our house. Our first ancestor and he fought hand to hand seven times, and neither got the better of the other. His lands became forfeit to the crown in the reign of Edward the Sixth, and were bestowed upon our house.”

“I should like to go there, father,” said she.

“It is too far, Lizzy, love, for your little feet,” returned he, kissing her; “but, oh dear, what old memories come over my mind as I think of Hartlebury Tower! I am but a fool for an old man,” said he, wiping his eyes—“but a sorry old fool!—but we used to go to Hartlebury Tower for owls’ nests.”

“What, you and uncle Tom?” asked the little girl; for her father’s boyhood and uncle Tom were not unfrequently the subject of their talk; and she was used to see her father shed tears when he spoke of those times.

“Ay, ay,” replied he, “uncle Tom, for sure! He was a high-spirited lad, as bold as Dick, but not half so boisterous; Dick’s too noisy for you and me, dear—yes, yes—and he was fonder of books than of out-of-door sports; and yet he never could bear that I should outdo him, even in the taking of an owl’s nest! Poor Tom! he wondered

how it was that I could climb Hartlebury Tower so much better than he, and he the better scholar!"

"Why did uncle Tom go?" asked the child.

"Bless you!" said he, pressing her little hand in the glow of affection that for the moment interrupted the current of his thoughts, "Why did he go? Oh, he was high-spirited, you see, and took offence when I meant none. He left me without so much as a 'God bless you.'"

"It was very unkind," said she. "And did he make you afraid of him, father?" asked she, a few moments after; for from her experience of her own brother she imagined so.

"I could always manage Tom," replied her father, "clever as he was, and headstrong too, when I was left to myself. He could never bear to be beaten at anything—not even at climbing Hartlebury Tower, nor in catching a minnow; and, speaking of minnows, I had just one way of managing him. Tom was no angler—he had no patience for angling—and yet he could not bear that I should beat him even in angling. Well, you see that little brook all fringed with alders—a mighty pleasant brook—and it was our favourite, for there are deep, still hollows in it, where the fish lie. Now Dick is no angler, or he might have good sport there: but, bless me! I forgot that we have not the fishing of that brook now! Well, we had it then; and as Tom was always out of humour when he could not be first and best at everything, I used to manage thus: while he sat poring over his book, a good way from his line, I

used to steal down to it, and hook him on a fine fish, and then bid him keep an eye on his line, and he, seeing there was something upon it, would come up eagerly, and, never suspecting me, be in good humour the rest of the day. Poor Tom! I had twenty ways of managing him!"

"I wonder," said the little girl, "whether he ever thinks of you, father?"

"I hope he does," replied he: "and I am sure he will remember nothing but what's good of me," added he, with the single-mindedness and simplicity of his character.

"But look, father, look!" exclaimed Elizabeth, pointing to the meadows below; "there's Dick and my mother riding home.

"Let us hasten too," said her father, "or we shall be too late for dinner: they come home so hungry after their rides, they never think of waiting for us!"

"It must be a fine thing to ride as well as Dick does," said his sister. "Do you not think him handsome, father? But I wish he were not so rude; he does talk so very loud!"

"Dick will be just like his mother," replied he; "she was reckoned a great beauty when I married her. But come along, Lizzy, love, or we shall be too late!"

And ten to one, after all, they would be too late, and only come in when Dick and his mother, having dined, were regaling their dogs.

CHAPTER IV.

SOWING.

Mrs. DURANT could not bear to part with her darling for school; he was therefore taught as chance directed, in such odds and ends of time as could be spared from his multifarious occupations of huntsman, sportsman, groom, and jockey. From his mother he learned the various arts, crafts, and accomplishments which fitted him for these characters; riding, driving, firing at a mark, knowing the points of a horse, betting with good luck; training horses and dogs, physicking them, and, if need were, even shoeing the former. There was no lack of employment for every day, and all day long.

By the time he was twelve, Dick Durant was the glory of a horse-fair, and the admiration of the race-course. Mrs. Durant was a proud woman, and would not contradict, nor otherwise, as she said, take down the spirit of a lad of his mettle.

A youth, such as we have described him, could have neither time nor inclination for much learning. The parish-clerk, however, "a desperate scholar," as the village averred, was hired to teach him his humanities; yet so many were his occupations, indoors and out, that it was marvellous how he ever learned to read and write. What Dick, however, disregarded, his sister made great proficiency in. Her father, as we have said, was her earliest instructor, and at five she knew more of primers

and pot-hooks than he did at ten ; but as she had a great desire for instruction, and the worthy schoolmaster took a vast fancy to so teachable a scholar, he filled up the time when Dick kept him waiting, or altogether absented himself, by gradually sliding her into the various branches in which he was hired to instruct " Master Richard."

But the learning which Elizabeth gained from this professor of the sciences was not at the suggestion of her mother ; for whenever she saw her so employed, she sent her off with a reprimand, and fetched in her son from the stable or kennel, " that he might attend to his books as became a gentleman."

At fifteen, his mother began to have some unpleasant misgivings as to her system of education. The curate of the neighbouring parish was then engaged as his tutor, and Dick was ordered to ride over three times a-week, with all his lessons prepared. The only rides that Dick ever objected to were these ; and numerous and most ingenious were the devices and excuses he had recourse to, to avoid them ; he was even known to have lamed his horse, as a reason for staying at home. His mother coaxed, and threatened, and bribed ; and at length he was so completely the master, that he did not learn even a Latin verb without a reward. All this suited him extremely well ; he had no love for learning, and spite of the bribe he had received for preparing his lessons, he played truant whenever he could, that he might not have the trouble of learning lessons for the next time. Dick's conscience was not at all a sensitive one ;

and he thought it a capital joke to cheat both his mother and his master.

At length the time came when he must go to college. It was a hard thing for his mother to part with him—the hardest trial she had known for many years; but to him it was pleasant enough. Dick Durant gained great celebrity at Oxford, but it was not of a creditable kind; and from time to time rumours reached Stanton-Combe, which troubled and displeased even his mother.

We have spoken about money difficulties which weighed heavily upon the estate. The advances which were made to Dick, during his college life, added greatly to them. He had never been taught the value of money, nor, what is even more important, the necessity of curbing his desires. It was enough for his mother that he expressed a wish; that wish was gratified, even at the cost of others' comfort. When Dick, therefore, went from home, at the most inconsiderate and self-indulgent time of life, he had no desire to study economy, although his mother had often declared herself "hard set to obtain even a pound."

The truth was, that by this time Anthony Sharple, of whom we before spoke, had assisted Mrs. Durant to involve herself completely in difficulties of all kinds. For many years, Sir Thomas Durant, his patron, who, as our readers are aware, had kept his eye upon his sister-in-law and the family estate, had through Sharple supplied her with money on every emergency, until the very amount of interest swallowed up all the rent. The family, thriftless as it was, had to be

maintained, and year after year the interest of Sharples's—or rather Sir Thomas's—money remained unpaid till it became a mountain of debt. Mrs. Durant kept hoping and hoping to clear off something; but every succeeding year found the family expenses greater; and Dick went to college at the time when Mrs. Durant had almost begun to despair of things ever getting straight again—at least before Dick married. Dick was very handsome, and after he had sown his wild oats at college he would come back, she hoped, marry some rich heiress, and clear off all encumbrances at once. There was no end to Mrs. Durant's hopfulness, when her son was the subject. “Young men,” she said, “must not be too much controlled; they were not like women; and it was a clear impossibility that they could live without money; they had a figure to maintain in the world; and Dick had always the spirit of a gentleman. It was money,” she said, “that was well laid out. What signified a little trifling difficulty now, there were only herself, Lizzy, and the old man at home? They would live on bread and water, rather than that Richard should deprive himself of what his standing in society required; she never thought much of a young man being headstrong and extravagant; it was natural, and was the sign of a fine spirit; Richard would be the making of his family, as much as his great ancestor Richard had been such before him.” So argued Mrs. Durant; and never failed to have arguments and reasons ready to excuse the disorderly conduct for which he received public

reprimands at college. At length she was informed by the heads of his college, that his misdeeds could not longer be tolerated. Reproof and disgrace produced no amendment upon him, and Richard Durant was expelled. He returned home, not ashamed, but enraged; he made, of course, his own statement to his mother, and she declared he was infamously used.

Stanton-Conibe was a dreary solitude to Dick, after his return from his wild college life. He got into divers scrapes; made friends of poachers, and went out with them at night; joined strolling players, and frequented fairs and wakes, where he got into all kind of low-lived troubles; till at length, tired of this, his fancy took a wider range, and he announced his intention of going to London. His mother made no objection to this, for she thought it would do him good to see the world. Accordingly she sold her own blood horse, and put sixty guineas into his purse, with a letter recommending him to the friendly care of Anthony Sharple; and having seen him mounted on the driving-box of the York mail, returned home with a sense of loneliness at her heart; for there was no life nor joy to her where her son was not.

Nothing could have pleased Anthony Sharple and Sir Thomas Durant better than to have him in London. His sixty guineas were soon spent—all the sooner because Sharple, who was his frequent companion, had given him a hint, that if he wanted money he had only to speak to him. When was such a hint ever lost upon a thriftless young man? Money was had for the asking, and

Richard led a merry life for three months. At that time he attained his majority. It had been the anxious and fond wish of his mother, that this birth-day, the happiest, as she thought, of all, should be kept at home; and she had already laid out the scheme of the day's festivity: but he knew that London was gayer than Stanton-Combe, even in its best days; and he laughed at the idea of going down there, just to please an old woman, who had set her heart on eating plum-pudding with him, and drinking his health in old ale!"

By degrees unpleasant apprehensions stole into Mrs. Durant's mind, and she wrote to Sharple to urge her son's return, and also to request that money might not be advanced; "although," said she, "he is now his own master. But you know, my good sir," she added, "the state of my affairs as well as I do; and I do not wish my son to involve himself in difficulties before he takes the management into his own hands. He has but one fault—a fault, I apprehend, common to most young men—disinclination for business. I have been unwilling, heretofore, to urge business upon him; but the time is now come when his good sense will be stronger than my persuasions."

Anthony Sharple smiled one of his most sinister smiles as he read the letter, and saw the mother was trying to impose upon her own judgment. He, however, informed Richard of his mother's wish for his return. Richard was angry that "she should set Sharple to meddle in his affairs," and vowed "that he would not go back for all the mothers in the world." Sharple urged him no

more ; and Sir Thomas was quite as well pleased that he staid yet longer, and involved himself in debts on his own account. At length, Richard himself began to talk of returning ; and, as a yet further step towards it, fixed upon a day. Sharple desired an interview with him on business. He then made him listen to a long detail of money matters, arrears of interest, and transfers of mortgages, through a period of ten or twelve years. Had Sharple spoken in the language of Tadmor he could not have been more unintelligible. One thing only could Dick understand—that no more money could be advanced, either to him or to his mother. Abundant were the apologies which Sharple made ; and, so far he explained himself as to confess, that he was but the agent of another person—of the money-lender, in fact, who was “ now determined to put things on another footing !” He wished it were in his power to accommodate them with money, “ but he himself,” he said, “ was poor.” Dick would have laughed at such an assertion, at any other time, but the lawyer’s countenance had made him grave too. Instead, however, of seeing folly in his own reckless extravagance, he only was angry with his mother, “ who had let his affairs,” he said, “ get into such a ravel ! Was there no way,” Richard asked, “ by which they could get out of the mess ?” Sharple appeared to demur, and then suggested that there was. “ If the entail were annulled, and sale of the land effected, all borrowed monies might be cleared off.” Dick did not like the idea of parting with his partrimony, and refused.

"We part then," said Sharple; "and I must present you with this small piece of paper, which, you will see, demands, within six months, the repayment of all money lent, with legal interest thereon." "It is impossible!" said Richard, looking with horror at the long array of figures; "you know it to be impossible as well as I do!" Sharple did not deny that, and again mentioned sale. Richard swore that sale should never be; and, desiring Sharple to turn it over in his head, took coach home; "being determined," he said, "to give the old woman a regular blowing up!"

Mrs. Durant was overjoyed to see her son, but he met her with reproaches; money quarrels are always bitter ones; and a scene of altercation followed, in which Richard out-stormed his mother, and she went to bed with a sore feeling at her heart, that her son treated her with great unkindness.

There was nothing which Sir Thomas Durant so much desired as, that the want of money should be severely felt at Stanton-Combe. The time which he desired was now come. In vain had Mrs. Durant, foreseeing coming troubles, reduced her own and the family's expenditure to the lowest scale. She had parted, as we have seen, with her own expensive horse; she no longer allowed herself a new broad-cloth habit each season; she attended no races, nor county balls, as she had formerly done. She parted with every extra servant who contributed merely to her own, or her husband's, or daughter's comfort. Richard only retrenched nothing—nor, certainly, did his mother

urge it upon him. "Poor fellow!" said she, "why should he?" So Richard kept his blood horse still, with his groom, and a horse for his groom. He had his roistering companions about him, and plenty of old wine to drink. He had his three or four suits a-year; his riding, his shooting, his hunting, and his dress suits; his boots, his hats, his whips, his spurs, his saddles; he saved in nothing: even his gloves alone cost nearly as much as his sister's clothes.

Mrs. Durant oftentimes, in the depths of her own mind, thought, though she never gave the thought words, that Richard might have more consideration than to spend so much upon himself; yet at that very time she was making him Holland shirts with cambric ruffles, each of which cost above a pound; and if any one—Anthony Sharple, or Lady Thicknise—censured the young man's extravagance, she not only stoutly defended him, but resolutely took his part. "He was moderate in all things," she said; "for a gentleman must have his indulgences; it mattered nothing to women—they stayed at home, and nobody saw them; but as long as there was a stone about the place, Dick should never go penny-lacking!"

If Mrs. Durant at any time remonstrated with him, or spoke of the desperate state of affairs, Dick, if he were in a bad humour, quarrelled with her; or, if otherwise, turned it off by declaring that he would marry and retrieve all.

"I will marry," he said, "our neighbour, Miss Letty Barham. She has twenty thousand pounds—and that will do something; or, if she will

not have me, I'll have Nelly Nicholson: she's older than you, mother, and never was so handsome; but Nelly would clear off all our incumbrances at a stroke of her pen, and leave plenty behind!"

At such sallies as these his mother laughed, and called him a wag.

CHAPTER V.

A CHAPTER OF TROUBLES.

TWELVE months after Richard's return from London, the crisis, which had been so long approaching, was at hand. Sharple had refused further advances, and again demanded payment of principal and interest; and, more than that, Richard was arrested for debt. Again, in desperation, they applied to Sharple. In return he sent the draft of a deed for cutting off the entail, and a letter recommending such a step.

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Durant, when she had hastily glanced over his letter, "that we should make ourselves the derision of the country; that we should give every petty upstart in the neighbourhood the opportunity of picking and choosing this field or that! No, no, Richard, I have not toiled night and day for that! I have not seen to the tilling of the land, like the commonest farmer, and attended markets and fairs, as no other gentlewoman ever did before me, only to

see your patrimony go from you, and you made a beggar!"

She wept; and he was troubled by her emotion. For the first time in his life, Dick thought he had done wrong; so he gathered the papers together, and said they would think about it again on the morrow. Dick thought it over all night, and also read the whole of Mr. Anthony Sharple's letter, postscript and all. The proposal did not appear quite so bad as at first it appeared. The letter declared "the cutting off of the entail to be merely a provisional step to satisfy the principal creditor." Little did they think that was Sir Thomas Durant. "That there would be no necessity for public sale; but it would merely pass quietly into other hands: and, moreover, they should remain as tenants in the place, until Mr. Richard Durant's marriage, or some other means, might enable them to repurchase the estate into their own hands. They would merely have to pay *rent* instead of *interest*; and besides, if, as was most likely to be the case, the estate, on fair valuation, was found to be worth more than the amount of money borrowed, and the arrears of interest due thereon, such money would enable Richard to stock his farms, and would, in fact, furnish a new capital—the very ready money of which he now stood in need."

To Mrs. Durant's amazement, Dick came down next morning dressed in his best. He was going, he said, to ask the hand of Nelly Nicholson; and if he had no luck there, he would e'en do as Sharple advised.

Before noon Richard returned from his wooing, but with a dark cloud on his brow, that told how he had sped. His mother made no inquiries. It was enough that he had been rejected; her heart bled for him, and she redoubled her kindness.

He was disappointed and angry, and it was in vain that she besought him to return a negative to Sharple—at all events to pause, or try his luck elsewhere. He was, however, the wilful man that would have his own way.

In two months' time the whole estate had been valued, the important documents drawn, and Sharple and another lawyer came down to Stanton-Combe, to see them properly signed.

There was a deal of signing of names to transfers of mortgages, and purchase deeds, and nobody knows what. The poor old father, now sunk into premature superannuation, signed his name whenever he was desired to do so, yet forgot the fact the moment afterwards.

We have said nothing of Elizabeth, of late, but, of course, she had now grown to womanhood. She was gentle and kind as the promise of her youth, but a cipher in the family. She was fully aware that all this signing of parchments had some deep meaning; but though she ventured to inquire what it might be, she was not favoured with any satisfactory answer; and when she suggested that her father, in his present state, was not responsible for his actions, and, therefore, his signatures could not be valid, she was sharply reprimanded for her interference; for although Mrs. Durant had sted-

fastly opposed the scheme at first, now that her son was bent upon adopting it, she not only acceded, but felt bound to vindicate it also.

In three days' time Anthony Sharple laid all the deeds, properly signed and witnessed, before Sir Thomas Durant.

"The bait has taken," said he; "they are fairly hooked now."

"That is right!" ejaculated Sir Thomas.

"Stanton-Combe is now *bona fide* yours, to have and to hold for ever," said Sharple; and he pointed to the different places in which the names of Edward and Richard Durant were signed.

Sir Thomas glanced through the parchments, and his eyes twinkled with satisfaction, and then fixed intently on the signatures. If there had been any goodness in his heart, it must have been touched by those signatures. The feeble, tottering handwriting of the old man, who had thus made away with his birthright, not knowing what he did; and the hurried scrawl of the son, who had done it as a man might take a fearful leap in the dark, with temerity, and yet with dread. He, however, only remarked, in a cold voice, that they both wrote very bad hands. The parchments were as precious to his soul as gold, and he grasped them tight, as he drove home in his coach.

Stanton-Combe had passed into other hands: into those, Anthony Sharple said, of the friendly money-lender, whose agent he was, and he had given his written assurance that the family should remain on the estate. These words, however,

had another meaning than what Mrs. Durant and her son understood; and nothing was further from her ideas than that Anthony Sharple was playing them false.

Richard Durant received between seven and eight thousand pounds, as the balance due to him on the purchase of the estate. "A miserable sum," said poor Mrs. Durant; and her heart sickened when she thought of it as the sole inheritance of that darling son for whom, in her eyes, the crown and sceptre themselves would not have been too costly a possession. However, they were still tenants of the land, still inhabitants of the house; and they had not only the assurance that the family should always remain in "possession as long as themselves desired it, but also that if Richard, by marriage or otherwise, were enabled to repurchase, he should do so;" and she tried to be satisfied. She had urged upon Sharple the most profound secrecy; and, being assured of this, she most resolutely set about retrieving the fortunes of her son. "I shall not rest in my grave," said she to herself, "unless I leave him the unconditional master and heritor of the home of his ancestors!" And, with an energy which her strong, masculine character, as well as her strong affections prompted, she commenced the accomplishment of her object.

Again retrenchment of all supernumerary comforts and indulgence was the order of the day. Still Richard's horse was continued, and Richard's groom; and he, who had his pockets better filled than they had been of late, with some portion of

the seven thousand pounds, led a jovial life. He rode in his scarlet coat to the hunt, attended races, and dinners, and balls; his poor mother flattering herself the while, that this was good policy; it was keeping the knowledge of their affairs from their neighbours; and besides this, that in some of these gaieties and goings abroad, Richard would meet with the rich heiress whose gold was to retrieve his ruin.

Mrs. Durant with renewed energy saw to the ploughing and the sowing of the land; she visited the cribs of the cattle in the farm-yard, and busied herself all the winter with her farming occupations. One trouble, however, haunted her—the indifference, if not neglect, of her son. She would not have permitted him, it is true, to have taken any servile part upon himself; she only wanted his sympathy—some evidence of his affection upon which her heart might gladden. But she had sown to the whirlwind, and she had to reap of the blast.

It was a melancholy winter; and what made it worse was, that she could complain to no one. She had enough to do to screen her son from the world's censure, without becoming his accuser.

In the spring, when Mrs. Durant was blessing herself with the promising appearance of her winter's crops, and had finished sowing her spring-wheat, and began to count the profits of the next harvest, she received a letter from Anthony Sharple, informing her that the former mortgagee and money-lender, now possessor of Stanton-Combe, was their near kinsman Sir Thomas

Durant; adding, that to his infinite regret, and contrary to his expectations, she and her family must remove from the place. And further, to enforce that purpose, a letter to the same effect was enclosed for her son, containing a legal notice to quit on or before the twenty-ninth of September next ensuing.

Nothing could equal her consternation on reading this epistle. No suspicion of double-dealing on the part of Sharple had ever crossed her mind before. She knew not what to do. Richard was gone to York assizes, and, as he had many acquaintances up and down, it was uncertain where to find him. She was quite adrift in her judgment. Sometimes she thought of making the whole affair known to her neighbours; but then the bitter secret of Stanton-Combe having gone from them would transpire. It never entered her head to do the thing which, of all others, would have been most natural and wise—to counsel with her daughter. That daughter, it is true, had gradually been permitted to take upon herself some share of the domestic management, and her mother had received from her consideration and kindness which, had they been shown by her brother would have made her the happiest of women: still she never made a confidant of her daughter; it would have been her last thought.

Mrs. Durant wrote to Sharple in the height of her indignation, and declared she would keep him to his promise; and that she valued his notice-paper no more than a straw; and that, while there remained a single tile upon the roof, no power on

earth should force her to leave its shelter. Having taken this resolution, she determined to say nothing whatever to her son on the subject; more especially as he was then paying court to the daughter of a rich baronet, whose fortune was but little inferior to the fair Kitty Perkins's. "I will never cross his love with ill tidings," said she.

The summer went on without any further communication with London. The harvests ripened, and were well got in, and the twenty-ninth of September passed without interruption. Very glad indeed was Mrs. Durant, now that she had kept all that vexation to herself. She thought it was merely a threat by which the unkind kinsman would fain distress and annoy them; and as Richard was again unsuccessful in his wooing, she doubly rejoiced that he had been ignorant of it.

She however waited with painful apprehension the coming of any letters or packets; but none, either from Sharple or Sir Thomas, arrived. She paid the first half-year's rent: a galling thing; but she called it *interest*; and under that head she entered it in her ledger.

October passed on, and no tidings reached them, and in November Mrs. Durant remembered that one day passed in which she had forgotten her apprehensions. But the time of trouble was approaching.

CHAPTER VI.

THREATENED EJECTMENT.

ON the last day of November, a dark, heavy coach-and-four, with two out-riders, arrived in the afternoon at the Durant Arms in the village of Stanton.

Two gentlemen, one elderly though still active, descended from the coach, desiring rooms for the night, and it might be for several nights. Nothing could exceed the bustle and excitement which this arrival produced. The bunch of dead michaelmas-daisies, a month old, was taken from the grate of the large, damp, best parlour of the inn; the shutters were closed, and a fire laid, lit, and coaxed into burning with all possible despatch. The landlord bustled about, in doors and out; the landlady looked important; a sound of frying, and savoury smells, went forth from the kitchen; and the curious villagers, who peeped in through the window-shutters, as the evening closed in, were able to announce that mutton chops and roast pullets were being served for the travellers' dinner. In the inn-yard, others found the lame ostler and the postillions, busy as possible, rubbing down the horses, while equal care seemed to have been taken to accommodate the large and handsome coach. This coach was soon perceived to be much grander and newer than the one at Stanton-Combe, which, however, had not now been seen

for many a day; the arms, nevertheless, were the same; and then it was discovered that this was no other than Sir Thomas Durant, the great lawyer, from London: "own brother," said the villagers, "to our Mr. Durant, come on a visit to his relations, no doubt on't." All this furnished a rich topic of conversation, not only in the bar of the Durant Arms, but in the kitchen of the Seven Stars, the inferior public-house, and by the blacksmith's forge also. The Durants had never been so much talked over before, not even when, five-and-thirty years before, "the new lady" had sent the younger son into the world; nor yet in later years, when the growing difficulties of the family, and Dick's wild pranks, furnished subject for wonder and speculation.

While "all the world" of Stanton was talking over these things, Sir Thomas and his companion, Anthony Sharple, accompanied by a third person, who walked considerably in the rear, were wending their way up to the Hall.

It was a damp and cheerless evening—a true November night—although the moon was about the full. The trees were nearly stripped of their leaves, which lay matted and wet below, and clogged the feet of the passenger as he trod among them. The wind was not loud nor strong, but was heard in the bare tree-tops sending forth long and deep sighs like the sobbing of a child. It was one of those evenings which would diffuse a pleasant melancholy over a mind at ease; but a troubled spirit would have been oppressed with its gloomy

character, especially if felt amid such desolate gardens, and such old neglected avenues as those of Stanton-Combe.

Even on a summer's day the aspect of the place might have saddened a common beholder, from the sense it gave of the decay of an old family. For while money yet was plentiful, and expenditure lavish, the place had been suffered to go to decay, because for several generations its income had been below its demands. Its garden-walls were now grey and mossy; its steps and terraces thrown down or broken, and from their chinks and among their ruins, snap-dragons, wall-flowers, and dandelions grew abundantly. In one corner stood a summer-house with leaded roof and fine carved stone front, but the wood-work was weather-worn and fallen to decay, the windows taken out, and one of them used as the substitute for the glass of a hot-bed frame. The grass of the broad lawns was untrimmed, and had encroached upon the unweeded gravel. The long lines of low balustraded wall, which bounded the sunny side of the flower-garden and shrubbery, was in some places mouldering brick by brick, in others cracked and bulging outward, and propped by stout pieces of timber; while one of the richly carved urns which surmounted its pillared extremities, was broken by the fall of a strong tree-branch, and the other thrown to the ground and half buried by tall weeds. Nor was this character of desolation and unthrift confined alone to the out-buildings and gardens; it extended itself also to the house, which never, of late years, had ap-

peared to be wholly inhabited. Smoke rose, but from very few of its many chimneys, and the inside shutters of its windows were either half or entirely closed from year's end to year's end.

All this could be seen only in part by Sir Thomas Durant, as he neared the place: he, however, could not help feeling and remarking to his companion as they walked on, that, as far as he could judge, everything seemed shockingly neglected. As they came within view of the house, a dim light, as of a fire, showed itself through two of the windows of the first floor—the windows of that very room, Sir Thomas knew, where he had parted from his family—the familiar old dining-room.

On this particular evening, the old man, Sir Thomas's brother, sat asleep in his chair; Elizabeth was seated on a low stool, reading by fire-light, and Mrs. Durant and Richard were playing at billiards at a small table which was placed in a large recess, or small ante-room, at the bottom of the apartment, lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling. All was profoundly still, except the crackling of the wood in the large low grate, and the striking of the balls in the little billiard-room.

A sharp pang went through the soul of Mrs. Durant as she heard the undoing of the iron fastenings of the large wrought-iron gate which terminated the fifty yards of flagged walk that led from the principal entrance. It was not often that that gate was opened, and who could this be that seemed familiar with it? The chain dropped upon the flags, and the hoarse creak of the iron

hinge in its socket was heard. She, however, only heard it—Dick was eager in his game, and Elizabeth was engrossed by her book. The next moment footsteps ascended to the door, and a thundering knock was heard. She needed not to be told what it meant; but a moment sufficed for her alarm, and then she stood calm and nerved for whatever might happen. Richard threw down his cue and hastily took a light, while Elizabeth sprung to her feet, less alarmed than apprehensive that sounds so strange and unaccustomed might terrify her father. “Who can this be? what can it mean?” broke from both Elizabeth and her brother, as the knock, which had not been answered by any servant, sounded again with increased violence.

Richard thought it was some of his roistering friends in a drunken frolic, and he smiled when he saw his mother, with her countenance compressed into unusual firmness, go to the door; for he thought there would be some sport.

A servant, who half an hour before had returned from plough, and whose dress—a carter’s frock and livery breeches—was a comment on the history of the latter days of the family, was, with the greatest possible attempt at haste, puzzling himself to undo the door. At another time the lady would have impatiently thrust the awkward servant aside, and have applied her equally strong arm and better skill, to have undone the fastenings; but she let him take his time now, and even admonished him to silence when he shouted to the strangers outside, that he was doing his best to

admit them, for she tolerably well divined that their errand was for no good.

At length the door flew open, and she received Sir Thomas Durant, followed by Mr. Anthony Sharple, and the third party of whom we spoke.

Sharple made an attempt at introducing his patron, but he was not regarded, and Mrs. Durant haughtily inquired from Sir Thomas, to what they owed the honour of his visit? He demanded, in reply, why he was kept out of his own house?

Sir Thomas, to whom the place was familiar, regardless of his sister-in-law's opposition, passed on to the room in which he had seen the light. Mrs. Durant followed him as quickly as possible, wishing to enter first, Sharple endeavouring in vain to detain her, speaking of "infinite regret, greatest possible esteem, and absolute necessity." She, however, with the utmost contempt, flung him from her, and entered the door with Sir Thomas.

The uncle had never seen his nephew, but he recognised the relationship instantly that Richard stood before him, and demanded from him, in a tone of anger and authority, "why so much trouble was given him?" and then, motioning to that third person in the rear, a paper of ejectment was put into Richard's hand, requiring him to remove from the dwelling-house of Stanton-Combe, with all his goods, chattels, and other effects, within the next four-and-twenty hours. Richard stared in utter amazement—for it must be remembered that the probability of this had been kept from him. His mother, however, per-

ectly understood it, and, snatching the paper from her son, tore it into shreds, and faced the kinsman.

"Mr. Thomas Durant," she began.

"Sir Thomas, if you please," interrupted Sharple, rubbing his hands.

"Be still, cockatrice!" shouted she, and again turned to her kinsman. "Mr. Thomas Durant," said she, "do your worst! Turn your poor superannuated brother into the open fields, and thank God that it is winter, that he may die of cold! Turn his children out into the wide world, and thank God that you first made them beggars! Do your worst!"

"Madam," began Sir Thomas.

"Yes, do your worst!" repeated she; "if you can do worse than make them homeless and penniless!"

"Mrs. Durant," said Sir Thomas, with a deliberation and coolness of voice that elicited attention even from her, "there was a time when I was sent hence as an intruder—a penniless adventurer into the world! Do you remember that?—most likely not—for the memory of an injury done, is like an impression upon water, soon effaced; but an injury received, is like a stone thrown against a mirror—the impression is retained for ever! Do you remember, I say, *my* going penniless out of this very door? No, no, you don't remember it," said he with a bitter sneer; "but I do!"

"Tom! Tom!" screamed the feeble tenor of the old man's voice; "I know that is Tom speak-

ing! What does he say? Pennyless!—is he pennyless? Give me your hand, Tom!" said he, rising, spite of the efforts of his daughter to sooth him and keep him back. "Shake hands with me, Tom! shake hands, for it is twenty—twenty—ay, it must be twenty years since I saw ye! Shake hands, Tom!" and his daughter supported his feeble steps along the floor.

"Keep him back!" said Sir Thomas to his niece.

"Did he say, 'keep me back,' Lizzy, love?" inquired he, looking into her face with the simplicity of a child. "Nay, nay! I will not be kept back; am not I glad to see him? and I could always manage him, let him be ever so angry! Give me your hand—speak to me, brother!" said he, putting forth his thin, feeble hand.

"You did not tell me of his state; you should not have suffered this!" said Sir Thomas, in an under tone, to Sharple.

"Brother!" said the poor old man, weeping like a child; "and you have been away so long, and yet come back again angry! Dear, dear! I could not have thought that! But, Tom, I once saved your life, when you fell into the mill-dam; are you still angry? You beat me, but I forgave you; you told lies of me, but I forgave you: I always loved you; and yet you come back again and are angry!"

The hard features of Sir Thomas relaxed; and, for the moment, he made no attempt to withdraw the hand which the other held; and he again went on.

“Did you say you were poor, Tom? Oh, if you are poor we will give you money; my wife will give you money, for we have plenty. Are you hungry? We have plenty of meat here! Speak only one word to me, Tom. I am an old man!” and he sobbed again like a child.

Elizabeth wept too. Mrs. Durant stood unmoved, so did Richard; and Sir Thomas beginning to think there had been too much of this scene, cast angry glances on his sister-in-law, and bade her remove her husband.

“Brother!” again said he, resisting the efforts Elizabeth made to remove him; “Brother, we are all glad to see you! Mrs. Durant,” said he, turning to his wife, “you are heartily glad to see him—tell him so! Dick, make your duty to your uncle! Lizzy, love, this is your uncle Tom. I have often told you about him; you must love him, Lizzy!”

“Father, father! say no more!” whispered his daughter, seeing plainly that her uncle’s visit was anything but one of friendship. “Come with me, dearest father!” and, unloosing his hands from their hold upon his brother, she endeavoured to lead him away.

“Husband!” said Mrs. Durant, seeing him turn to go away with his daughter, “this is your brother, come to rob your children of their patrimony; come to turn you and them out of doors! To drive them,” she continued, with hysterical energy, “from house and from home, from bed, board, and fireside!”

The old man turned back again, and, lifting up

his feeble arms, exclaimed, "In the face of Heaven, tell me, Tom, is it so?"

Sir Thomas Durant was pale, both with emotion and anger. "What I have paid for," said he, "is it not mine own? Did not thine own hand sign the deed by which this inheritance became mine?"

"No! no! never!" screamed the old man. "Never! I will die rather than sell my birth-right! Thou shalt not have it—I tell thee thou shalt not! I will not sell my children's inheritance! I will not! By Heaven, I will not!"

"You have done it already!" replied his brother.

"Have I?" exclaimed the poor old man. "No, I think not! I love my children too well. I am a feeble old man, I know; but I should never do that; and I never will!" exclaimed he; "and, clever as you are, Tom, you shall never persuade me to it! No, no! I will not make my children beggars! and may him that counsels it, and he that does it, perish in the ruin it will bring!" At this moment, exhausted by the violence of his excitement, he sunk back, and would have fallen, had not Richard supported him, and showed then more kindness to his father than he had ever done before.

Sir Thomas Durant was affected by this interview; but he was accustomed to control his feelings. As soon, therefore, as his brother was removed, vehement words passed between him and his nephew, who had known nothing of his part in the transaction, nor of the legal notice which had been sent to them, till that very evening,

when Sharple, drawing him aside, had hastily made him acquainted with these facts. He felt as if he were standing upon a gulf which was widening below his feet; but whether he was more angry with his mother, who had concealed these later facts, or with his uncle, who had thus treacherously entrapped them, it is impossible to tell. All was uproar and confusion; and Sir Thomas at length made a hasty exit, glad to feel himself safe on the outside that house which he had been so eager to enter scarcely an hour before. The two had not, however, reached the door-steps when Sharple returned to say that he and Sir Thomas should remain at the Durant Arms for the next four-and-twenty hours.

Poor Mrs. Durant thought now indeed that the cup of her troubles was full to overflowing, and especially as her son would not appreciate the motives of kindness which had kept these threatened evils from his knowledge. It was in vain that she protested that no power on earth should compel them to leave; that they would go to law about it; that she would spend the last farthing she could raise in defending her son's right. Richard was at first pale with passion, and cast upon her the most unkind upbraidings, and then sunk into sullen anger, and paced about the room till past midnight, without vouchsafing her either word or look.

"Oh," said the unhappy woman, when she was left alone, "I can bear all but this. To be reproached by him!—by him for whom I have

done so much!—between whom and trouble I have always stood! This is, indeed, the bitterest of my sorrows!”

CHAPTER VII.

A REAL EJECTION.

MR. DURANT was put to bed in a state of insensibility; and Elizabeth, not choosing to leave his apartment, sat down by the fire. She was oppressed by the saddest feelings—anxiety for her father, and an imperfect comprehension of the nature of her uncle's visit. Some great sorrow she was sure hung over them, which was even more apparent from the mystery that involved it.

The most profound silence reigned in the house for some time after Sir Thomas's departure, in which the sound of her mother and brother's voices, in angry disputation, reached even that remote chamber. From time to time she stole to the bedside to see how it fared with her father; but though he was evidently ill, from the excitement of the evening, he appeared to sleep calmly.

She sat by the fire, hoping that before long her mother, whose chamber adjoined her father's, would look in upon them before she retired for the night. But the hour of her usual bed-time passed, and no one came. Poor Mrs. Durant never thought of sleep that night; and still Elizabeth sat alone, listening in that state of intense

excitement, when the watcher seems to become all nerve, alive to every sound, and when the vision swarms with fantastic images.

At length the voices of contention had ceased; all was profoundly still; then steps seemed passing about hurriedly below; doors opened and shut hastily; occasionally voices were heard, and then all again sank into the same dead stillness.

Again and again Elizabeth stole to the bed; turned the curtain slowly aside, and looked in upon him, but he still slept. In that deep silence the great clock of the cupola tolled one, with a solemn, startling sound that seemed appalling; it was like a knell, and it flung upon her soul an awful sense of death, and solitude, and desertion. She commended herself to Heaven, and tried to reassure herself that, let human fortune gloom as it may, all are still in the hands of the Eternal Father. "God is about us," said she, "when we are most forlorn!" and falling on her knees at her father's bedside, besought the protection of Heaven for them both.

She arose strengthened and assured, and began to think of settling herself for the night in the large easy chair which stood upon the hearth, when Bridget, an old servant, entered. There was a curious mixture of trouble, indignation, and important business in her countenance. She sat down on a low seat opposite to Elizabeth, and, placing her palms flat upon her knees, leaned forward, with her elbows projecting outward, in her attitude of interminable talk.

"Lord, Miss!" she began, "and all this to

happen of a Monday night! If it had been a Friday, no wonder. Fridays are always unlucky! And so we are all to go afore morning! Christians and brutes; live stock and dead; furniture, linen, and plate; beds, bedding, china, and glass; and no thought taken for the breakage and the smashery! Lauk, Miss! it would take a month to pack them as they ought to be packed. And the pictures, and the books, and the looking-glasses," continued she, as if she had been reading from a catalogue; "and the harpsichord, and the knick-knackery, and the stone-ware figures (statues,) as came out o' foreign parts, how are they all to be got away in four-and-twenty hours? that's what I should like to know! But no, thank ye, there's no thought taken for nothing! Out all must be turned, and leave nothing but bare walls!"

"You must be mistaken, Bridget," said Elizabeth.

"Not I!" replied she. "Not I, indeed, Miss Elizabeth. And if master should die, as like enough he will, for we have had winding-sheets in candles, and a matter of ten death-watches in the house all within the last month; why, then, I should like to know who has been the death of him?"

"My poor father!" sighed Elizabeth.

"And only to think," said Bridget, "that it was his own brother—them that were children together in this very house—little innocent children! And now here he comes cursing and swearing! I wonder he warn't ashamed, and he the

younger brother! Lord help us! and they say as how he has got all made over to himself, and that neither Mr. Richard nor the master there can touch a penny! Nothing is their's, say they, but what the house holds; and I should like to know what household stuff is good for when there's no longer a house to hold it! Bless me! and what is to become of all—live stock and dead! say nothing of the family, nor any of us that have spent our lives in its service, and have neither kin to welcome us, nor house to cover us? I should like to know what's to become of us, Miss Elizabeth!

"Alas!" said Elizabeth, with a deep sigh, and eyes full of tears.

"Why, now," said Bridget, "what an old fool I am to come here troubling you; for, Heaven knows, there never was a kinder heart than your's: that there never was!"

"But will not my brother resist this aggression of my uncle's?" asked Elizabeth, "and my mother, too?"

"Lord, Miss!" replied Bridget, "things seem to me to have ta'en a turn quite right about, for there's been Madam and Mr. Richard at high words for these hours."

"It is very strange!" said Elizabeth, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Strange enough," said Bridget; "but I've that to tell which is strangest of all. The piece of armour that belonged to my Lord Viscount, and stood in the gallery, has fallen to the ground! It fell from its place as Mr. Thomas—Sir Thomas

they call him—slammed the hall-door in going out. Every soul in the house, except Madam and Mr. Richard, has been to see it; and, what makes it more stranger still, this very piece of armour fell down, the very night, may be, five-and-twenty years since; nay, more than five-and-twenty—likelier thirty years since—when this same Sir Thomas, a young man then, quarrelled with the master that lies in his bed there, and set off, Heaven knows where, and never entered the place till this night, when he is come to bring ruin and trouble to every one. It is a strange thing, Miss Elizabeth, a mighty strange thing!”

“It is,” said Elizabeth, “a strange and melancholy thing altogether. My heart aches with apprehension!”

“No wonder, poor dear!” said the old woman, “no wonder! And if we are all to be turned out of house and home, I should like to know where we are all to go. Times are not what they used to be, when there was money for the asking! I warrant me, Madam never thought to see the day when we might want a mouthful of bread!”

Elizabeth made no reply, for then a deep sigh, and the feeble voice of her father, arrested her attention. She stood beside him instantly, and bent over his pillow.

“God bless you, Lizzy love!” said he, “you are my only comfort!”

“My dearest father!” replied she, deeply affected by the solemnity of his manner.

“You never grieved me! You are all the

comfort I ever had," repeated he, "and may God Almighty bless you!"

These consoling but solemn words overcame her already excited feelings, and she wept while she affectionately kissed his hand.

"Thank God!" she at length said, "you are better!"

Again and again she spoke; but, though her father's eye appeared fixed on her countenance, she received no answer. Bridget brought the lamp to the bedside, and they saw that, though still alive, a great change had passed over him: he was speechless.

"Call mother!" whispered Elizabeth, alarmed and distressed, "and bid her come instantly!"

The old woman obeyed, and presently returned.

"Lord love you!" said she, "Madam is crying by herself, in the great parlour. I never saw such a sight before. I spoke twice before she heard me, and then she was mighty angry. 'And can't you give him a drop of wine,' says she, 'without disturbing me?'"

"My poor, dear father! my beloved father!" sobbed Elizabeth, and turned away from the bed. The old man's eyes followed her, and an indistinct sound was heard, as of an attempt to speak. Again she bent over him; and the old woman prepared such stimulants as were at their command. Elizabeth took the cold, feeble hands and rubbed them in hers; she laid her warm cheek to his; and Bridget, the forty years' nurse of the family, employed all her skill to recover him. But it was too late. Life was no further ex-

hibited than by the lingering and affectionate expression of the eyes. The last sentiment of the dying man was grateful affection to the dutiful daughter, who had been a joy to him through the whole of her life, and who now was the comfort of his death-bed.

It was not till three o'clock in the morning that Elizabeth could indeed believe her father to be dead; but then the pallid and fallen countenance, and the glazed eye, forced the melancholy truth upon her. She burst forth into no loud lamentation, and yet her desolate situation, her friendless and forlorn state, the one who had loved her most lying dead before her, all fell upon her spirit with a chill that almost overwhelmed her.

When Bridget went down to communicate the death of Mr. Durant to his wife, she found her still sitting where she had left her, not weeping; the agony of her grief had subsided, for it was only the moment of extremest suffering that could wring tears from Mrs. Durant; but she sat pale, and as if stupified by deep thought.

"Master is dead!" said Bridget, without preface of any kind.

"Dead!" repeated the lady, with something like a shudder. "God rest his soul!" and, putting her hands before her face, Bridget declared that she wept; that Madam Durant had wept twice in one night!

"Dead!" repeated Mrs. Durant to herself, soon after Bridget was gone; "then, at least, we must have time to bury him! With a corpse in the house we may defy his ejectment. We will have

time for the burial; and I will have a funeral which shall collect about us all our friends and neighbours. I'll make the country cry shame on the man who oppressed the family of his dead brother!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FAMILY AFFAIRS.

AT day break the tolling of the church-bell announced to the villagers the death of Mr. Durant; and Anthony Sharple, who was stirring early, carried up the tidings of this unlooked-for event to Sir Thomas in his bed.

"It is a device of that artful woman's," said he; "the old man is alive: as much alive as I am," continued he, rising in his bed.

"I dare swear it!" returned the acquiescent Sharple.

"But I will not be defeated! I will not be played with! and without *bona fide* evidence of his natural death, the ejectment shall be enforced! I'll not be made a fool of!" said Sir Thomas: "send me my valet instantly; I will rise!"

Sharple did as he was ordered; and, while his patron dressed, walked into the village to gather up opinions as to the supposed death of the master of Stanton-Combe.

Everywhere he found people engaged in talking over the strange events of the night preceding, rumours of which had come down from the

hall to the village. Old men and women were relating anecdotes of the boyhood of the two brothers. "Ay, he was a fiery, hot-headed man, that Thomas Durant!" "Desperate clever," said another, "but desperate proud, and loved by nobody!"

"Now, him as is dead," said a third, "had a right kind heart of his own, though his head was none of the strongest. He'd have given a poor man the last shilling he had in the world!"

"I mind me when he was a boy," said a very old man, with thin, white hair, and who leaned on two sticks; "I mind me when he was as pretty a boy as you'd see on a summer's day! He gathered nettle-tops and green yarbs (herbs) for my Sammy, as died of a waste! Lord-a-me! and he's dead, ye say!"

"Ay, Neddy," said another, "dead, sure enough! and his own brother, as one may say, the death of him!"

"Hey! hey!" returned the older man, "it's a wicked world we live in, a very wicked world!"

"And say ye," asked a woman, "that this London lawyer, this Sir Thomas, is come to take possession of Stanton-Combe, in his own right?"

"Never, never;" returned the very old man, putting his two sticks into one hand, and turning his other on his hip, to enable him the better to look the speaker in the face; "never, I say; for it was all tied upon heirs male. But he's a bad man, that Thomas, as I've heard say, without conscience; and Anthony Sharple's no better!"

At that moment Sharple was seen amongst

them; and those who thought he had not heard made their bow, as to the satellite of the rising sun; and they who believed the contrary, made the best of their way off, shrugging their shoulders. Presently after this encounter, Sharple found old Bridget, who had volunteered to Mrs. Durant the carrying of a message to the undertaker and coffin-maker, in order that she might unburden herself of the news she was able to tell. Through her Sharple learned how Madam Durant and the young master had quarrelled; not that Bridget had any direct communication with him, but as he stood within the inn yard, he listened to the gossip she held with a couple of old crones.

“Misfortune’s a-coming!” said Bridget; “we’ve had nought but signs of late—coffins, and winding-sheets; and such a croaking of ravens, and screeching of owls! Such things never bode good! Lauk-a-me! such a night as I have had!”

“And so, the old master is dead!” said one of the gossips.

“Sure, is he! replied Bridget, “and no wonder neither, so as he was turmoiled over night!”

“Well, but Mrs. Bridget,” asked the other, is it true you’re going away at a minute’s warning?”

“There is neither law nor justice in it!” said the other.

“Neither is there!” said Bridget; “and a team of horses won’t move Madam, if it be not her will. But ye see, the old master has died lucky just now; there must be time to bury him. Madam

would raise heaven and earth, but she would have a burying; and a grand funeral we shall have!"

"What! the body laid in state, like the old Durants of former times?" asked one old woman.

"Sure," said Bridget; "they were getting the state-room ready when I left; and I have sent Thomas Doleman and all his people up, to take measure for the coffin, and to see to the hanging the walls. It will be a fine sight, I promise ye!"

"Yes, yes," replied her companion; "I remember, more nor forty years ago, how a body lay in state there; all hung with black cloth was the room, at seven shillings by the yard; and the funeral train reached from the Hall to the church; there were seven-and-fifty blood-relations, all on horseback, in black cloaks and hat-bands!"

"Forty years ago!" interrupted the other; "that was seventy years ago! It was the grandfather of him that is now dead, Walter Durant; him as the king sent into Germany: I was a young lass then!"

"Oh, well!" returned the other, "but there will be no such funeral now. Things ar'n't as they were then!"

"Lord bless you! but it will be a handsome funeral, though," said Bridget, alarmed for the honour of the house; "Madam will have it handsome, were it only to spite 'em. There'll be the lying in state seven days, wax-lights burning, all the country bid; gloves, and scarfs, and hat-bands; burying-cake, and plenty of cold meat and drink! What more would ye have?"

All this Anthony Sharple heard, and was convinced by it that the death was real; but as he was not in the habit of contradicting his patron, and Sir Thomas chose to believe it only a pretence in order to gain time, or to throw odium upon him, Sharple likewise pretended to acquiesce, and promised to ascertain the fact, even by obtaining, if needful, a sight of the body, dead or alive.

After Richard Durant and his mother had parted in anger, as we related in our last chapter, he went to bed, and while there began to revolve various plans for his own conduct, independent of his mother. Sharple and he had been boon companions in London, and he flattered himself that he possessed influence with him, through which the original promise of his remaining on the estate might be secured. He determined also to try his influence with his uncle, especially as his resentment was strong against his mother; and he blamed her as the cause of all their troubles. "It was all the consequence," reasoned he, "of trusting important affairs to a woman; he would, he determined, take the management of everything into his own hands." His groom had brought him the news of his father's death, and that strengthened his determination still further. They could not be ejected from the premises while the corpse remained uninterred, and this would give him time; besides, by his death, he was legally master of all; no longer Mr. Richard, but Mr. Durant.

Richard's plans were undefined, but all his wishes tended towards conciliation; when, an hour

after breakfast, he set out on his way to the Durant Arms. Midway, however, between the village and the Hall, he met Sharple, who, as we have seen, had been despatched by Sir Thomas to ascertain the truth respecting the death of his brother.

When Anthony Sharple saw Richard approaching, he put on a solemn countenance, and affected a tone of condolence, saying that he was extremely sorry to hear of the event of the night; "but," added he, "the gentleman was old; the shock could not have been great to his family, though the time, certainly, was unlucky."

Richard in his turn assumed an air of distance, and, with a voice much more subdued than common, and which might have imposed upon one less skilled in worldly knowledge than Sharple, said he was penetrated with sorrow for the loss of his father. "His father's death," he said, "had no doubt been caused by the violence of the last night; that he himself was overwhelmed by it; that his was a hard case, a cruel case; and that he was a very ill-used man; especially as his mother had kept all latter transactions from his knowledge; but that he hoped he and his uncle might come to terms; that he did! And for his part, he would be glad to leave all in his uncle's hands, who was, he was sure, a man of honour."

Sharple looked into Richard's face with some curiosity; and he wondered how much of all this was really true. But Richard seemed to wait for Sharple's answer, and he therefore spoke.

"He had been sent up by Sir Thomas," he

said, to ascertain if the report were true; not that he himself doubted it for a moment, but Sir Thomas was suspicious:" and Sharple shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, he did not approve of suspicion; "but, such being the case," he continued, "it would be extremely satisfactory if he could have a sight of the body."

Richard felt half disposed to resent this as an insult; but as he was hoping to gain his own advantage, he merely replied that Sharple might see the body, and welcome, if it could do him any good; and led the way back to the house.

Richard marshalled him up the grand stair-case to the state-room, for he had heard of his mother's design of the grand funeral, and knew the body to be there. The house was profoundly still, like the house of death; no servants met them on the stairs, and even the hard nature of Sharple felt as if his were a sacrilegious visit. The solitude and silence, however, of the house was not peculiar to this day: we know what a deserted place it was: but at this particular time the few inhabitants, with the exception of Elizabeth, were all met in one room, as we shall presently see.

Mrs. Durant having conceived the idea of the lying in state, immediately set about preparations for it with all the energy of her character. Bridget and old Simon, and the two other servants, were ordered to attend her in the state-room, upon the lofty bed of which the corpse had just been laid, stretched on a board and covered with a sheet. Thomas Doleman, the undertaker, had been down; and, as Mrs. Durant wished to practise economy

at the same time that she made an imposing show, she determined to make use of every available article that the house contained, on the occasion. Now it happened, that on some former occasion of a costly funeral, a quantity of black cloth had been put by, as also a velvet pall, black plumes, and various other paraphernalia of costly mourning. Thomas Doleman had engaged to do all that was requisite, and had returned to his own house for the purpose of preparation; in the mean time the lady and her attendants had ransacked the ancient stores of the family. In this room, and about this business, accordingly they were busied, when Richard and Anthony Sharple entered. There were all lengths and breadths of cloth, dusty and moth-eaten, scattered about; and already had a hanging of black, in which three ominous rents were conspicuous, been fastened to the wall, as if in trial of its effect. The chairs were burdened with various articles of female mourning, part of the wardrobe of some grandmother, or great-aunt, which this funeral search had now only brought to light. There was something ludicrous, and yet melancholy, in all these forlorn efforts at miserable grandeur, in the very presence of the senseless dead. There was a strange contrast, too, in the eager business-like faces of the living, and the strong rigidity of the corpse, the outline of whose figure was visible under its linen covering.

Had that body risen up and spoken, the consternation could not have been greater to the living, than that caused by the entrance of Richard and

his companion. Mrs. Durant dropped the plumes she had been shaking, and experienced such a pang at her heart as a dagger's point might have occasioned, in the anguish of seeing her son violate the privacy of that chamber, in friendly alliance with their cunning enemy; and, with a countenance in which surprise and anger were about equally blended, she advanced three steps to meet them.

"Is it for your pleasure, Mr. Durant," said she, addressing her son, "that this man comes here? If it be, I have but one word for both of ye—begone!"

"Mr. Sharple would know of a certainty," said Richard, "that my father is dead. The body is here," said he to Sharple, pointing to the bed, and going forward as if about to raise the covering.

"Touch it at your peril! lay finger on the dead man, an' you dare!" exclaimed she, furiously

"What am I to infer?" asked Sharple, turning towards Richard: "that it is a mere feint?"

"Suppose what you list!" replied the lady; "but be sure of one thing—in three seconds you shall be pitched from the window. Simon! clear the room of this fellow!" said she to the strong old man, who, with nails and a hammer in his hand, stood by in gaping wonder.

"Madam!" said Richard, taking hold of her, "stand by, and let Mr. Sharple see the body; stand by, or worse may come of it!"

But Anthony Sharple had seen enough; and, fearing that some violence might be done to his person, was already outside the door; and Richard, seeing him gone, followed also.

Sharple waited for no apology, no explanation, but, hearing a step behind him, and not knowing exactly whether Richard was friendly or no, and apprehensive lest the lady's threat was about to be enforced, made his escape at full speed down the stairs, nor would have been overtaken at all, but at length he became bewildered with turnings to the right and to the left, and, between confusion and despair, faced about to see who pursued. Richard was half ready to laugh; for while Sharple assumed a tone of offended dignity, it was plain that he was almost frightened to death. He looked grave, however, and, remembering he had yet his own turn to serve, offered some apology for his mother's vehemence, gave the most solemn assurance of his father's death, which the other, however, was not at all inclined to doubt, and said he would accompany him to the inn, in order that he might have an interview with his uncle.

The attendants wondered that no outbreak of indignation, or threat of vengeance, followed the departure of the intruders; but Mrs. Durant was suffering more intense agony of spirit than could vent itself in words. She mechanically took up the plumes she had thrown down, shook the dust from them, and went through the examination of cloth and velvet, but her head was no longer in the work; her earnestness and vivacity were gone. Insult and defiance had been thrown in her very teeth by the idolized being for whom she had cared, and toiled, and suffered, and for whom she could do even more than this yet! Her very soul seemed sick within her. She gave her orders

at random; one moment a thing was to be done, the next to be undone, till, perplexed and bewildered, the servants talked to each other, wondering what it meant.

"Leave it, Simon, for the present," at length said the unhappy lady; "close the shutters, and let the black candles be lighted!"

"With your leave, madam," remarked Bridget, "common candles will do till the room is hung; no one will be admitted till all is finished."

"Leave it," she replied, "leave it altogether, for the present. I will ring for you when I want you."

The servants left her; and the strong woman, whose frame was like that of a man, and whose courage, and decision, and fortitude, could have borne her through any other trial and privation, wrung her hands and wept passionately.

"Oh, my son!" she exclaimed, "how have I been deceived! how have I been wounded by you? I never thought to see this day, when I nursed you on my knees, when I carried you in my arms! Oh, my little curly-headed Dick! my beautiful boy, whom I loved so dearly, and watched over night and day, and toiled for as never mother did before! Now I know what it is to be unfortunate! now I know what it is to be wretched, and poor; for the loss of affection is worse than the loss of houses and land!" And again she wept, and even groaned aloud in the agony of her spirit.

The singular demeanour of Mrs. Durant had excited the notice of her servants, and Bridget

hobbled into the parlour to relate it to Elizabeth.

"Lord, Miss!" began she, "something strange has happened to Madam!"

"How! what?" exclaimed Elizabeth, terrified with a hundred fears.

"Why, there is she taking on so in the state-room, where the master lies, as though her heart would break. I have been to the door three times, and you may hear her groaning outside; but it's all along of Mr. Richard!"

"Poormother!" said Elizabeth, "I will go to her."

Elizabeth paused a moment ere she entered; and, as Bridget had said, the sounds of her mother's grief were audible, and the kind-hearted girl rushed in, eager to comfort or aid her. Mrs. Durant sat on a couch in the room, with her face buried in her hands, and sending forth low groans which expressed deeper anguish than words. Elizabeth closed the door after her, but the sound did not rouse her; and, fearing that her mother might be displeased to have any witness of her emotion, she hastened to make her aware of her presence.

"Dearest mother!" said she, touching her shoulder lightly, "dearest mother! what ails you? what can I do to comfort you?"

Mrs. Durant looked at her daughter like one roused from a lethargy, and inquired, in a stern voice, "Who sent for you, child?"

"I feared you were ill; I see you are unhappy: what can I do for you?" asked her daughter, with the utmost kindness of manner.

“What business have you, child, to think me unhappy?” demanded the mother; “when I want you, I shall send for you.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Elizabeth, unappalled by her mother’s anger, and excited to the deepest sympathy by her pale and sorrow-marked countenance, “oh! that you would let me be with you! that you would receive kindness from me!”

“When I want kindness from you,” still returned her mother, “I will send for you: what I want now is to be alone.”

“May I send Richard to you?” persisted Elizabeth.

Mrs. Durant fixed her eyes sternly on her daughter, and replied, “I want neither one nor other of you. Have I not trouble and sorrow enough, without your adding to it?”

“You have, dear mother!” returned Elizabeth, tears starting into her eyes; “you have! indeed; you have! and God knows, I would fain lessen it if I could.”

For one moment Mrs. Durant seemed touched by her daughter’s tenderness, and mild tears filled her eyes; but the next, as if surprised at her own weakness, she repelled them, and replied coldly, “You cannot, child, you cannot do me the least good. Leave me, and send Bridget, and Simon, and the rest of them.”

Elizabeth obeyed; and Mrs. Durant, with wonderful self-command, collected herself, and stood again amid the paraphernalia of mourning. She gave her orders with precision; tatters in the cloth were mended, moth-eaten parts cut out, and,

with the help of Thomas Doleman, before evening the walls had assumed their hangings of black.

By the next night, black plumes nodded over the canopy of the bed, and the arms, properly emblazoned on a hanging of black velvet, adorned the bed's head; the bed itself was converted into a kind of throne, on which the coffin, covered with black, was placed, and all around black drapery hung in sweeping folds to the floor; four tall black wax tapers stood at the four corners of the bed, ready to be lighted, and which were designed to cast a sombre illumination over the bed, leaving the rest of the apartment in stately and solemn gloom.

All this occupied two whole days in the doing, but it wonderfully diverted Mrs. Durant's mind from its more immediate troubles; and, as during that time she never saw her son, she kept her heart with all its griefs locked up like a miser's treasure.

We left Richard last on his way to the Durant Arms, to have an interview with his uncle.

The interview was, of course, not satisfactory. It was in vain that he endeavoured to throw all the blame, and mismanagement, and misunderstanding, on his mother, or to obtain for himself either concession or good-will. Sir Thomas condescended to no explanations, further than what Sharple had given. He conceded only one iota in his nephew's favour, granting him one calendar month, until new-year's day, to bury his father, and to make sale of his effects. In vain poor

Richard pleaded, threatened, stormed, and even tried to coax and flatter; Sir Thomas was immoveable; and his nephew was unpleasantly sensible that he stood before him as an inferior in intellect. "Oh," thought the unfortunate young man, "if I could but have him up to fight it out with me, I could do; but, hang it, I am no hand at talking!" and, vexed and mortified, he was almost ready to cry.

"On new-year's day," replied Sir Thomas, with the most provoking coolness, "I, or Mr. Sharple, or both of us, will be down to take possession. I am not to be played with, young man; and now, as my carriage is at the door, I must beg you to detain me no longer."

Richard walked out of the inn, and with his hands in his pockets stood to watch the departure of his uncle. His old friends of the village kept aloof from him, although they had often acknowledged him to be "a good sort of fellow, who never grudged a crown to make a man drunk!" But it had now got abroad that things were going wrong at the hall, and that crowns would not be so plentiful as they had been; therefore they were less solicitous for his notice.

Sir Thomas was seen at the upper window of the inn, fur-coated up to the chin, and drawing on his gloves preparatory to descending to his carriage, which was now drawn up close to the door-stone. Richard beckoned one of his old cronies up to him.

"Here, Timson," said he, taking half a guinea

out of his pocket, "give the old wolf a parting salute."

Having said this, he walked deliberately up the church-yard side, still taking care not to lose sight of the Durant Arms. Timson perfectly understood what he was expected to do; and, just as Sir Thomas issued from the inn-door, and was about to seat himself in his carriage, a volley of stones thundered about, shivered the glass of one of the carriage-windows, and even threatened the demolition of Sir Thomas's person. He seated himself, however, and Sharple, having jumped in after him, the door was hastily closed, and the postillions, putting spurs to their horses, posted away, the outriders coming after with equal speed. Shouts and hootings, the eloquence of the mob, pursued them down the street; proving, at all events, that Richard had stout partisans who, for money, if not for love, would take his part.

He did not return home till late that night. He was so well pleased with the zeal of Timson and his other friends, that he determined to give them a day's drinking. All the village was, of course, agog about the strange things that had happened, and were about to happen, at the Hall; and as it was soon noised about that "Mr. Richard" was at the Durant Arms, everybody flocked there.

Richard was that day very popular; and before night, everybody had sworn "to side with him through thick and thin," and to give Sir Thomas, let him come when he would, such a reception as

should make him remember Stanton-Combe to the latest day of his life.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FUNERAL.

AFTER Elizabeth had been repulsed in her attempt to comfort her mother, she anxiously wished for her brother's return, in the belief that whatever disunion there had been between them, it would soon be made up, and that he, in fact, was the only person who could allay her natural anxiety and distress of mind. But Richard came not through that day, and it was with great satisfaction that she saw, before evening, her mother had regained her usual equanimity, and appeared so completely absorbed by the funeral preparations, as to have forgotten, at least in appearance, not only her own individual griefs, but the alarming crisis which was approaching in their worldly affairs.

All this preparation for a costly funeral, for one who, in his lifetime, was so little regarded by the principal members of the family, seemed to her the height of folly, nay, almost like a mockery of the old man's memory. She ventured even to question her mother on the subject. "Was it," she asked, "what her father himself would have wished? And furthermore, as it was known to the whole country round what a quiet retired life he had led for years, nobody would expect to see

him buried like the old Durants, who had held important offices in the county, and had been well known to everybody. She feared," she said, "they might look ridiculous in the eyes of their neighbours; and though that was a reason of small weight, when duty or moral principle were opposed to it, she, for her part, felt keenly now and she thought Richard would feel it too."

"Child!" replied the mother, with a countenance almost of disdain, "you talk like your father! Is this a time, I pray you, to stoop down that we may be trodden on! that we should let our enemies know the extent of their power to humble us! No, no; we will at least preserve our own self-respect!"

"But," replied Elizabeth, "we cannot be showing self-respect by making ourselves ridiculous. God knows that I loved and honoured my father, but I would beg for him only a quiet burial. We never consulted him, in his latter years, how a single pound should be spent; and had we done so, he could have given us no counsel; it is unseemly then, I think, to make for such a one a pompous funeral; especially," she added, after a pause, "when money is like to be short enough with us."

"I will have a funeral," returned her mother, without noticing her arguments, "which shall not disgrace a Durant! What! shall it be said that we have not the means to bury our dead?"

"Never mind what is said," replied Elizabeth, amazed at herself for arguing, and at her mother for permitting it; "let him be buried decently

and quietly—that at least we owe him; but we can show him no reverence by impoverishing the living, merely for senseless cost over his dead body.”

“You know nothing of what befits the credit of a family,” returned her mother, who had only allowed her to argue, because she had no regard for her opinion; “how should you?”

“I do not think Richard would advise this expensive funeral, nor Lady Thicknise, either,” said Elizabeth.

“Do not worry me to death!” returned Mrs. Durant, impatiently; “surely, I know what is right! I will have, I say, a noble funeral, if I melt down the family plate, bit by bit! I will bury my dead as a Durant ought to be buried, and I will gather about us our neighbours and connexions, and know at least who are our friends?”

Elizabeth opposed her mother no further, but she sincerely hoped that something would occur to prevent a thing so absurd as this pompous funeral.

Richard, as we have said, did not see his mother that day; and the next, attended by his groom, he set off for Darlington, to consult a lawyer and to order his own mourning.

In the meantime, although Mrs. Durant was engaged so much by her funeral preparations, and although she had been so seriously displeased and grieved by her son’s apparently friendly alliance with Sharple, still she was full of thought and anxiety about him. She feared he had withdrawn

his confidence from her: the very idea of neglect and unkindness from him filled her soul with anguish. Then she excited herself by fears respecting him—vague apprehensions of she knew not what; and many times in the course of the day she exclaimed—“Oh, that he would but come! that I did but know where he was! that he was only safe from danger!” And many a time she went to the window, to see if he were visible in his homeward way.

It was not till the third day that she heard he was gone to Darlington. “It was unkind,” she said to herself; “he at least might have told me of his journey, had it only been to spare my anxiety!”

Alas! poor woman! her son had never been taught to spare her anxiety; how then should he have thought of it at this moment?

But spite of the many causes of uneasiness, the preparations for the funeral went on. Letters of invitation to all the kith and kin, even to the remotest connexion, were written and sent; the same likewise to all their neighbours, till the burial of Mr. Durant came as much to be talked of, far and near, as an election itself. The undertaker was very well pleased with the job, for it was many a long year since the Durants had made a great funeral, and the traditions of his family told of famous doings in this way; and good Thomas Doleman, be it known, was not remarkable for worldly wisdom, and overlooked the very important fact, that the Durants had sorely gone down in the world since then.

The old state apartments, by Mrs. Durant’s

orders, were again opened and aired for use; fires were burning in every room, and three or four village women were employed to polish up the ancient furniture. To see all that was going on, it would have been imagined that the family had a life-long residence before them, instead of being on the sorrowful eve of departure for ever.

"But it all will be right!" she would argue with herself; "for if it comes to a sale, things will only look all the better! But it never will come to that! they shall drag me out by force, before I leave!"

For the twentieth time Mrs. Durant reckoned up who of her relations and her husband's—with all of whom, however, for these twenty years, there had been no intercourse—she might expect to honour the funeral. Somehow or other she persuaded herself that everybody would come; and she gratified herself by the vision of a numerously attended funeral, a stately procession of hearse and mourning coaches, friends' and neighbours' carriages, and half the country on horseback, winding down the hilly park-road to the village church.

"It will show *them*," she said, "that we are respected, and have those who will do us honour!"—the *them* always meaning Sir Thomas Durant and Anthony Sharple.

On the fourth day after the death of Mr. Durant, Richard, who had heard at Darlington of the grand funeral and the proposed lying-in-state, although certainly he was not unaware of his mother's intention when he left home, wrote to

her, decidedly forbidding it. "It was the **most** absurd thing she had ever done," he said, "and he now saw that it was high time he took the management of his affairs into his own hands, for that she was, like all other women, unacquainted with business, and quite unfit to be trusted with money."

As a postscript to this dutiful letter he also added, "that he should not hold himself responsible for any debts which might be contracted on this occasion."

This was indeed a cruel blow; but another letter also arrived nearly at the same moment.

We have not yet mentioned what, however, was the fact, that both Mrs. Durant and her daughter had written to Starkey, the one to Lady Thickniss, the other to her friend, Mrs. Betty, informing them of the late melancholy and perplexing events. At the very moment, therefore, in which Mrs. Durant was reading her son's letter, she was informed that a messenger had arrived express from Starkey with letters. Mrs. Betty's was full of kindness and sympathy; a comfortable letter, that did Elizabeth good, although it occasioned her many tears. Lady Thickniss's, however, was the epistle of importance. Mrs. Durant, hurt and offended by the one she had received from Richard, tore open the one from her friend, hoping to find consolation and assurance in it. The letter was as follows:—

"Starkey, December 4.

"**DEAR MADAM**—Your letter has excited the most lively concern. I hope it is needless to say

how deeply I sympathize with you. The loss of my esteemed friend, your husband, I trust, is his gain. God's will be done!

“What, however, is at this present moment of importance for you to know, I hasten to communicate. Fortunately, my lawyer, Mr. Twisledon, was with me when your's arrived, which I laid before him; and now enclose his opinion on the state of your affairs. I fear from this, that you have no chance against Sir Thomas Durant: you will see that he knows that gentleman well: whatever he has done, he says, the law will bear him out in. I fear the law sanctions much that is unjust; and, moreover, which I greatly regret, he declares that you cannot resist the ejection, having had legal notice to quit.

“I need not say the regret I feel that your and my godson's affairs have fallen into such confusion. I fear, however, that my godson has not always been as discreet in his expenditure as he ought: I have heard of him both at York and Doncaster, which I regret.

“What has urged me more especially to send off to you express is regarding the funeral. Considering the private manner in which your good husband lived, I think a public funeral unadvised. Nothing, I believe, but the present agitation of your mind could have induced you to sanction such a proceeding. If it is my godson's doing, I cannot think highly of his judgment. All needless cost, in the present state of his affairs, should be avoided: very few, and those only your immediate neighbours, need be invited, and for these

the expense would be moderate. *But by no means let the body lie in state.* Your doors are thus thrown open, and some of that lawyer's creatures will be getting in, whom you will find trouble in getting rid of again.

"The urgency of the occasion must excuse my plain speaking.

"I am, dear Madam,

"Your friend and well-wisher,

"SUSANNAH THICKNISSE."

The postscript to this letter ran thus: "Should there be a sale of the effects at Stanton-Combe, I should like that the pair of ebony cabinets, which stand in the great drawing-room, be purchased for me. Of course, they will be appraised; I do not wish to give more than their value; but as I have an old friendship for the family, I may as well possess them as a stranger."

Mrs. Durant was staggered in her own opinion. Formerly, not heaven nor earth could have induced her to change a favourite opinion; but she was not the woman she had been, and the very wavering of her judgment produced a depressing sensation. She felt like one at sea, without rudder or compass, and for the moment, forgetting Richard's letter, she wished he were there to counsel with her.

Great was the amazement of the house when Mrs. Durant announced that the lying-in-state was not to be made public; and that no one was to be admitted to the house without her knowledge. The preparation for the funeral feast, however,

went on as before; "for," said Mrs. Durant, "they who are bid to the funeral must, of course, be received. But why cannot Dick come and look after these things himself, seeing that now I cannot do ought to please him?"

"What is come over Madam?" said Bridget to Simon, who was major-domo.

"A sad waste of nails has there been," returned Simon, "to put up those black hangings; seven-and-twenty score of ten-penny nails, and all of my own driving; and, after all, nobody coming to see it!"

"And the candles that have been burning ever since," said Bridget.

"And the wax-lights that were had for the show, and them never to be used," said Simon; "and I warrant, Thomas Doleman won't take 'em back again!"

"And all this scrubbing and rubbing, this mending and airing," enumerated Bridget; "Lord-a-me! and all to no purpose!"

"Madam has never been herself since that night," remarked Simon, shaking his head; 't's a sore thing losing of house and home!"

"And the quarrel with Mr. Richard," returned Bridget; "that cuts her up worse than aught else!"

The eighth day after Mr. Durant's death was appointed for his funeral, and Richard returned on the evening of the sixth. Mrs. Durant had been consumed by the most painful anxiety during his absence, and the moment she heard his voice her heart leapt with inexpressible affection;

yet, as he entered the room she assumed an air of displeasure, greeting him with unusual coldness : for it was but right, she thought, to make him sensible of the respect he owed her ; and his letter, certainly, had shown no regard to her feelings or her peace of mind.

But Richard came in no mood to humble himself. The lawyer whom he consulted at Darlington, and who was to follow him the next day, had assured him that his mother was the mainspring of all their troubles. So, in fact, she was, for she had sacrificed everything to Richard's supposed interest, and his reckless self-will ; but that was not the way they reasoned. And he had assured him also, as Mr. Twisledon had assured his mother, that opposition to Sir Thomas Durant would produce no other effect than involving them in law, and swallowing up every sixpence they possessed. He returned home, therefore, in the full spirit of his letter, resolved to be henceforth master of his own affairs, and full of contempt for women as managers of business.

The first glance of his sullen countenance convinced his mother, that whatever might be the state of her wounded feelings, the present was not the moment to upbraid him. A complete reaction took place in her mind ; and, not having been of late in his confidence, and knowing neither the state of his feelings, nor the cause of his present ill humour, she feared to say one word that might either wound or annoy him. A flood of affection passed over her soul, effacing every late vexation ; and, with unwise zealousness to win his confidence,

she now overwhelmed him with little well-meant acts of kindness, every one of which operated as a goad to his excited temper.

"Bless my soul, madam!" said he at length, as she urged him to the enjoyment of some accustomed luxury, which he had refused with pettishness, "will you take from me the indulgence of my own freewill?"

A few minutes afterwards, with a countenance full of contrite affection, she made another effort to oblige her wayward son. "I'll tell you what," said he, starting up and pushing her aside, "if you will not let me take my own course, in small things as well as great, I will leave this house, and you shall never see my face again!"

Bitter tears were in Mrs. Durant's eyes, but she forcibly repressed them; bitter words, too, sprung to her lips, but she would not utter them, determined that nothing on her part should widen the breach between them.

"Have patience with her, dearest brother!" said Elizabeth, starting up the moment he had spoken; "say not anything, I beseech you, that you may afterwards repent of!"

Poor Mrs. Durant sank into her chair and wept, for her daughter's words overcame her.

"I am not likely to repent of what I do," said Richard. "It is women that do silly things; and why does she pester me? I'm sure I would not have come back at all, if I'd known there would have been such a fuss!"

"Speak kindly, Richard," whispered she, see-

ing her mother's unwonted emotion, "for she has many troubles to bear!"

"So have I!" exclaimed he aloud, determined that his mother should hear all, "and troubles, too, of her bringing on!"

"Richard! Richard!" exclaimed his mother, starting up, and dashing aside the tears that blinded her eyes, "this I have not deserved! God knows, if I could have died to save you I would! and I wish I was now lying beside the corse in yonder room, rather than have heard the words you have spoken!"

"It would have been better if you had lain there," remarked Richard, coldly.

"Just Heaven!" exclaimed the unhappy mother, dropping into her chair, and wringing her hands, "what have I done to deserve this?"

Elizabeth stood beside her, without speaking, and Richard sat down to finish the supper which this dialogue had interrupted.

An hour afterwards Richard seemed still to prolong his meal, and his mother still was seated in her chair; not a word had been spoken. Elizabeth felt as if she were an intruder, as if she perhaps prevented a reconciliation, or prevented her brother's offering atonement for his cruel words, and she retired to her own room.

No sooner was she gone than Mrs. Durant again made an attempt to establish peace between them.

But we will spare ourselves and our readers a relation of what followed. High words and

hysterical sobs were heard by old Bridget outside the door, and she also averred that Richard had struck his mother.

Elizabeth, whose heart was depressed by the scene she had just witnessed, and by her own forlorn and melancholy prospects, although she retired to her own room, did not retire to bed. Long past midnight she heard her brother ascend hurriedly to his own chamber, the door of which he closed with violence. She listened to discover whether her mother also retired for the night; but as all remained still, and she well knew that only some deep cause would keep her up when Richard had left her, she stole softly down stairs to learn if she could render duty or service.

She entered the room. Her mother sat with clenched hands, and countenance of concentrated misery, but there was neither tear in her eye, nor trace of tear on her cheek.

"Mother! dearest mother!" said Elizabeth.

Mrs. Durant did not hear the words.

"Dearest mother! speak to me!" exclaimed she, falling on her knees before her, and terrified by her immobility. "Speak!" and she caught hold of her hands.

"Serpent! viper!" exclaimed Mrs. Durant, catching away her hands, and starting up.

"Mother!" repeated Elizabeth, rising from her knees.

"Go, child!" said she, fixing her eyes on her daughter with great severity, "go, I say!"

"I will not go," replied Elizabeth, with ten-

derness, and yet with firmness; "not till I know that it is not in a daughter's power to render service to a mother. It is the privilege of this most holy and tender of relationships to perform such a duty, and I demand this privilege from you! Before Heaven, I demand it!" said Elizabeth, again sinking upon her knees before her mother, and kissing her hand. "Grant it me, beloved mother!" she continued; "confide in me; let me know your sorrows, that I may know how to comfort them."

"You cannot, you cannot, child!" returned her mother. "It is not in mortal power to comfort me! I have suffered that which is without remedy!"

"Say not so; think not so!" exclaimed her daughter. "You know how my father loved me! Let me be to you what I was to him! I should never be weary of performing my duty."

"Rise, child, rise!" said Mrs. Durant; "urge nothing now; I am not in a state to bear it. Show your duty at least by leaving me! God knows, I am a mother to be pitied!"

"May He bless you and comfort you!" said the affectionate girl, weeping tears of sincerest sympathy; "and, please Heaven! the time will come in which you shall receive my affectionate service!"

She retired again to her chamber, and, in its silence and solitude, poured out her full heart to God.

Mrs. Durant did not leave her own room

through the whole of the next day, and Richard was busied with the Darlington lawyer, who had arrived that morning.

The morrow was that on which the interment was to take place. What a relief poor Mrs. Durant found it, in the present state of her feelings, that some part of the funeral ceremony had been dispensed with; and now even she wished it could have been altogether private. She was not in spirits to encounter the bustle of many guests, and those family connexions with whom intimacy had now ceased. She felt as if she had, indeed, done a great folly; she feared that her son might betray want of respect, or want of confidence towards her before the funeral company.

Elizabeth divined what her mother's feelings would be, and, greatly as she disliked the publicity of the funeral, determined to spare her as much as possible. Old Bridget, and Simon, and Thomas Doleman, wondered at her activity and forethought.

"So as she fretted about him!" said Bridget; "who'd have looked for her to take thought about everything!"

"She's better notions of things even than Madam," said Thomas Doleman, "and a very pretty way of speaking to a body!"

"Well," said Simon, "I never saw Madam give in so afore! but we shall have her in her tantrums when all's over!"

The next morning Mrs. Durant roused herself with a desperate effort, to do all that might be needful on that trying day. She had not seen her

son since the night of his return; what, therefore, were his sentiments towards her, she knew not. She wished she could but catch a glimpse of his countenance, for on the first token of submission or contrition, on his part, she was prepared to receive him again into her soul. It was not, she felt, a time for disunion, and she listened, therefore, for the sound of his footsteps, as he left his chamber, eager that, spite of what was past, she might make the first advance towards reconciliation. But she listened in vain; and then, as the time went on, hoping that he was already down stairs, she went herself to the breakfast parlour.

The undertaker had already arrived; and as she had a glimpse of the mutes standing outside the door, and perceived what an unusual stir and ceremony there was throughout the house, her very soul loathed it. When Elizabeth met her mother that morning, she was shocked at the alteration in her appearance. It was not alone the straight hair, and the widow's cap, but a change much more affecting even than that. The bright complexion was gone, and she looked pale, as if from the effects of severe illness; and there was an uneasy tremour about the mouth, that told of suffering of the heart. It seemed as if a few hours had done the work of years. "Surely," thought she, as she glanced at her mother, "surely, when he sees that face, he will be excited to kindness."

Mrs. Durant sat, all ear and attention, secretly hoping, spite of all the means she had taken to secure a large attendance, that no one would come. It would be far better, she thought, to

bear a slight from people, that in truth she cared nothing about, than be humiliated by her son before them. As to appealing to the congregated guests, even if half the country had assembled, against the aggressions of their kinsman, that was an idea that was quite gone. It all seemed like a chimera, and she wondered how so short a time had so completely changed not only her feelings but her power of action.

At nine o'clock a dozen of neighbours, farmers and small landed proprietors, had arrived on their stout horses, to attend the body to the church. They had come partly out of curiosity, and were now drinking ale and eating cold beef in the steward's room, while the undertaker's men were busied with their scarfs and hatbands.

In the meantime, innumerable were the notes of condolence and apology which had been sent in to excuse the non-attendance of all the various branches and connexions of the family, near and remote. There seemed no prospect, indeed, but of a small funeral. Poor Mrs. Durant! she wished again that nobody had been asked; felt very angry with them all, and thought, with a sigh, of all the funeral baked meats which nobody would come to eat.

The slow tolling of the church-bell had been sounding all the morning, and groups of villagers stood at the corner of the road, by the church-yard wall, and about the Durant Arms, to witness the show.

It was now two o'clock, the time fixed for the moving off of the funeral procession. Elizabeth

and her mother, both appalled in their deep mourning, sat together in their morning room, but Richard, the chief mourner, had been seen by no one. The most intense anxiety filled Mrs. Durant's heart. She never felt so unfitted to combat difficulties before. Richard filled her with the deepest perplexity, yet she would not for the world, that any one should imagine it to be so; she even tried to think nothing of his absence.

"He is busy," she said, "with his lawyer; he thinks nothing of time. Simon, tell your master what is the time; let him know that our good neighbours have arrived."

The anxious face of Thomas Doleman next presented itself, to say that all was ready.

Mrs. Durant herself knew it; for she herself had seen the coffin carried into the hearse, and the mourning coach drawn up to the door, and the dozen neighbours, hat-banded and scarfed, mounted upon their long-tailed horses. But she now saw far more than this: there were no less than eight carriages ready to take rank in the procession; there was the Dickon's and the Prescott's Sir Thomas Wodom's, old General Merton's, and the Wilbore's; Squire Waddifield's, and Sir Charles Blackiston's; and, besides these, a cavalcade of gentlemen, all men of reverence, hat-banded and scarfed! She had no idea of all this! It was really gratifying—it was kind! and poor Mrs. Durant felt as if good days were returning, as she eyed this honourable array.

The truth was, the death of poor old Mr. Durant, at the very moment of the deepest family

troubles, had filled all hearts with sympathy. He had always been respected, and people would not, at such a time, withhold this small token of regard to his memory, particularly when it must be consoling to the ruined family. On the contrary, those very persons, connexions of the family, upon whom Mrs. Durant had calculated most, were unwilling to show countenance to the dishonoured and fallen branch, when, perhaps, they themselves might be helped to advance by the new branch, which was so greatly in the ascendant.

When Mrs. Durant saw that this funeral, after all, was likely to turn out an important affair, it roused her up at once to her usual energy.

"What does the foolish man mean?" said she; "are we to be disgraced in the face of half the country?" and, rushing out, she hastened to her son's room, and presented herself before him."

"Dick!" said she, her eye flashing as she spoke, "am I to attend as chief mourner, or you?"

The bewildered undertaker followed, with Richard's crape-bound hat in his hand, which he presented.

"Pray-ye, Mr. Richard," said he, "do not keep 'em waiting; there's every look of rain coming on; and it makes such work with things!"

Richard muttered something about the money that was spent, yet he put on his hat, and took up his new black gloves; and then, taking the arm of his friend, the lawyer, who met him at the door, without vouchsafing the slightest regard to his mother, they walked deliberately down the great

stair-case, mounted the mourning-coach, and the funeral procession was put in motion.

Mrs. Durant had the pleasure of witnessing such a funeral procession as would not have disgraced the head of the family in its better days. It made, certainly, a very imposing appearance; and she sat down to pen a paragraph for the county papers, whereby she hoped to make it evident to Sir Thomas, in London, that they were not without honour among even their more influential neighbours.

The farmers, and the undertaker's people, alone returned to dinner, and a jolly carouse was made, for there was no lack of eatables or drinkables. As the important business of the day was now over, Mrs. Durant, finding that Richard was engrossed with his law friend, retired to her own room, and was seen of none of the household again that day. She had a new, although a petty source of annoyance—her new costume. The widow's cap and the bombazine very little suited one who had worn a riding-habit and a black silk caul for thirty years. She was almost disposed to forswear the new costume for the old.

CHAPTER X.

THE BREAKING UP OF A FAMILY.

ELIZABETH felt that nothing could be worse for them, a broken household as they were, with a gloomy and uncertain future before them, than

the present want of unanimity. She despaired of gaining, all at once, the confidence of her mother; she resolved, therefore, to try what influence she had with Richard, and she anxiously wished for some favourable opportunity.

The next morning, however, Richard himself opened the communication by telling her that she and her mother must look out for some place for themselves; for that, on the twentieth, the sale would commence, and he should want the house free of all encumbrance.

Elizabeth was shocked at the unfeeling tone in which this communication was made, and she inquired if he had thought of any plan for them.

His answer was simply, "No."

"Remember, Richard," she replied, "that we are all fellow-sufferers; we must assist each other with counsel."

Richard replied, that he had enough to do to think for himself.

"Let us retain," said Elizabeth, "this comfortable reflection, that through all our troubles we have acted with kindness and confidence one to another."

"My patience!" exclaimed Richard, "and what good will that do!"

"All," replied his sister; "for without affection one for another, how tenfold forlorn are our prospects! I am sure if we would be happy, we must cultivate a spirit of love and good understanding amongst ourselves."

Richard said he wanted nothing but a good understanding with them.

"Then," replied his sister, "let your mother at least know what you are intending to do. We are in the most trying circumstances!"

"The dence we are!" was the reply.

"And now, brother," said she, "I myself will act according to what I recommend. I ask, earnestly and affectionately, of you my own brother, what step do you counsel me to take? I have had many little schemes for myself, but none exactly please me."

"Oh! how should I know?" answered he; for he had never been taught to think for any one but himself.

"Richard!" said his sister, the tears starting to her eyes, "I am the most forlorn of us all; you and my mother were always dear friends to each other; she loved you as she never loved me. I have lost my friend. Oh, brother! that you would but fill his place; that you would but let us love one another, and act in unison! We are young," she continued, "and I think we might defy our troubles, if we loved each other; if we were a united family."

Richard's silence showed that he was not prepared with an answer, and she asked—

"Have you seen my mother to-day?"

"No!" he answered abruptly; "nor do I want!"

"Will you give me then some message to carry to her? some kind word or two?" demanded his

sister. "She looks ill, Richard, and I am sure she is unhappy! Just say three or four kind words;—that you are busy or you would go and talk with her, or that you send your love to her."

"Stuff!" returned Richard. "But now, do you understand me," resumed he; "did you understand what I said about having the house clear of you? I shall have the sale on the twentieth."

Elizabeth sighed deeply, and then replied, "Yes, indeed, I understand you, and that again brings me to my argument; think for us, dearest brother; where shall we go? We have no home; that you know as well as I do!"

"Oh! I'm sure I don't know!" returned he; but the tone in which these words were spoken seemed kind, and she pressed his hand to her lips.

"I have thought sometimes," said she, "that I would go to the old school-master's till all this bustle is over; for then I should be at hand if I should be wanted, or if I could be of service either to you or mother. What a privilege it is," said the poor girl, with tears in her eyes, "to be of value and of use to somebody!"

"Heaven knows!" she again resumed, "what a bitter thing it will be to me to leave this dear old house! Oh, Richard, it is a hard case! it is a cruel, cruel case! and I do not wonder at your anger! I and mother, however much we loved it, might naturally look to leave it sometime, but you never! I love the house, and the old, desolate gardens; for, in my quiet way, I have had my pleasures, all the deeper, perhaps, for being quiet; and, thank Heaven! come what will, I shall think

of this sweet old home, and my poor, dear father, as Adam and Eve must have thought of the garden of Eden, and the angels that visited them there!"

"It is a burning shame!" said Richard, "that I am to be driven away thus from my own place!"

"As a matter of law," said she, "I know no thing about it; but I suppose it is quite gone from us."

"The old rascal!" exclaimed Richard, grinding his teeth; "but—" and he shook his head without finishing his sentence.

"I think," resumed Elizabeth, "it will be the death of mother!"

"Pooh!" said Richard, "old women don't die so easily!"

"Do not speak of her in this way," said his sister; "she has been a most devoted mother to you. You know not how much keener is an unkind word even than a sword's point! and the present is not the time when we should increase our sorrows by unkindness to each other!"

At that moment Mrs. Durant entered the room. Elizabeth wondered whether Richard noticed the change in her countenance; but he said nothing; he only looked doggedly into the fire.

Elizabeth rose from her brother's side, and, offering a morning salutation, placed a chair for her mother. Mrs. Durant paid no regard whatever to her daughter, but, going straight up to her son, presented her hand.

The young man neither rose nor seemed disposed to obey.

“I insist upon it!” said Mrs. Durant. “I ask it as no favour; I insist upon it! Foolish boy, I say, give me your hand! I command you to let us be friends! Far better would it have been for you to have gone down on your bended knees to me, than have thus compelled me to seek you! Troubles have brought down my pride; and I, your mother, say to you, we will be friends!”

Richard placed his hand ungraciously in his mother’s, and she then sat down beside him.

From this time there was an appearance, at least, of terms being kept between them. On one point, however, they differed. She wished to contest the case with Sir Thomas at law, believing that Sharple’s promise to them was binding; or at least to oblige him to enforce the ejectment, which she thought would bring odium upon him. Richard’s policy, however, was different; he had his law friend’s opinion that it was vain to oppose Sir Thomas; Stanton-Combe had fairly passed into his hands; and with his money he had the means of bribing public opinion. Everything was in his favour, and Richard seemed willing likewise to go with the tide. He said, “he would sell all, stick and stone; turn everything into money; and, as to revenge, he would take it in another way!” Neither his mother nor his sister inquired in what way; and, as he did not tell them, neither will we confide it to our readers.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREAT SALE BY AUCTION.

STANTON-COMBE was a fine old place. It was full of stately rooms, finished with carved wood-works, rich ceilings, and ornamental gilding, and filled with furniture of the most costly description; everything, it is true, was dimmed with neglect and disuse, but all were faithful and affecting chronicles of splendour and prosperity that had been.

It was a melancholy thing to see the cold, hard-visaged men of business prying through their ancient rooms, and bringing, with unhallowed hands, as it seemed, all their secrets to light; ransacking cabinets, and diving into curiously inlaid presses, which had held, in trusty ward, the brocades, and the lavendered linen, and the rich lace of many a now forgotten lady. It was sorrowful to see strangers, whose only object was "to turn a penny," examining old portraits of handsome men, graceful women, and round-faced merry children, the once happy and hopeful dwellers of the mansion, and rating them by their value as mere canvass and paint; to see curious and costly old relics, and works of art, which had once been the treasured possessions of some now forgotten master of the house, about to be dispersed into a hundred different hands!

Elizabeth hardly ventured to think of what was going on, or of what lay before her, even in the

near future. The revealing to vulgar and money-making people the secrets of the house; the throwing open of those disused chambers, which had been full of mystery to her childhood, and of melancholy interest to her more thoughtful years, seemed like the first act of a tragedy, in which preparation was made for all the dark work that was to follow—the final desolation and ruin of an old family.

Little as the principal members of the family had of late years been held in esteem by their wealthier neighbours, a sentiment of pity filled the hearts of the kind, at least, and Elizabeth and her mother received unexpected and cordial invitations to partake the hospitalities and shelter of their roof, until the present season of trouble was over, and their plans for the future were matured. There is a general sentiment of kindness and pity in human nature, let misanthropes say what they will; and the fountain in the arid desert is not more blessed and welcome, than such evidences of good feeling to the unfortunate and the unhappy.

Mrs. Durant, however, adhered to her first avowal, that nothing less than absolute force should remove her from the place;—in her own words, which she invariably used, “she would remain there while the roof stood!” Elizabeth would gladly have availed herself of the good-will of her neighbours, had not the necessity for her so doing been prevented by a letter from Mrs. Betty Thicknise. This good lady had obtained

from her sister-in-law the favour of an invitation for her god-daughter.

No sooner was the letter received than she began to make preparations for her journey, or, more properly, for her final departure. It was indeed a sorrowful task, but necessity in this case, as in many others, was a kind task-master: there was no time allowed for her to think; nor was it till she took her seat in the carriage, which had been thoughtfully sent for her, and drove down the avenue, and past the broken and decaying wall of the pleasance, that the full sense of its being a *last* departure came upon her.

Who does not know, that has the least spark of sentiment in his soul, the melancholy import of those words—"for the last time!" Elizabeth felt them at that moment in their full force; she was leaving the home of her childhood, the grave of her father, for poverty and an uncertain dwelling among strangers.

At the turn of the road, the fine old house, with its many details of ornamented gables, massy chimneys, and large bay windows, stood before her, at the head of its avenue. It had never looked so stately; it had never felt so dear to her heart before; and the last view of the home of her fathers was taken through blinding tears.

All was a scene of bustle and preparation. Richard and his man of business seemed to enter, body and soul, into the arrangements for the coming sale. Everywhere they might be met, with important faces and dusty coats, and with men at

their heels, hastening to take down and to put up, and to present everything with its best face to the public; or, with writing materials in their hands, assisting others in preparing catalogues.

The auctioneer, a sort of George Robins of those days, was now down; catalogues were printed, and the

GREAT SALE BY AUCTION,

of furniture, pictures, books, musical instruments, old china, wine, family-plate, and linen; works of art, cabinets, inlaid wardrobes, splendid pier-glasses, &c. &c. &c.; besides farming stock and cattle, a valuable hunter and other horses, hounds, pointers, and other dogs, &c. &c. &c.; all the property of the late Edward Durant, Esquire, of Stanton-Combe, in the county of Durham, was duly advertised in all the London and provincial journals.

Then came down London picture-dealers, although it was mid-winter, and travelling was not so easy a thing in those days; but down they came by coach, and mail, and post-chaise; picture-dealers, second-hand book buyers, amateur collectors of all kinds; furniture-brokers, and all the neighbourhood beside, poor and rich; for the great sale at Stanton-Combe had attractions for everybody.

In one respect Richard had shown attention and care for his mother; he had been just to her. Everything that was hers, or which she could lay the remotest claim to, even down to a china tea-cup, he ordered to be removed to whatever place

of security she chose. All this, and it was neither inconsiderable in quantity nor value, she declared should never leave the house; it was therefore stowed into those rooms which she appropriated to herself and old Bridget, whose services she retained. Among the valuables which she secured was the carved oaken chest containing the linen said to have been spun by the brownie of the house, and with which superstition connected the fortunes of the family.

"This," said Mrs. Durant, "is my son's property, but I will be its warder; and, let poverty come upon me and grind me to the very dust, this precious heir-loom I will not part with even for bread."

It was stowed in a safe place, and Mrs. Durant would not trust Bridget with the key.

It was now the twentieth of the month, and nothing was talked of far and near, but the great sale, and what was reported of the place and all that it held, by those who had been there. People who were ill in bed thought themselves especially unlucky, not because they were ill, so much as because they could not go to the sale; and so great was the concourse of people, and their horses and vehicles, at the Durant Arms, and the Seven Stars, that the landlords declared "they should lose their senses," and the ostlers and waiters, that "they were fairly run off their legs!"

It had been suggested by Richard's lawyer, that Sir Thomas would have his agents at the sale, to purchase up everything connected with, or commemorative of the family; and, therefore,

these bidders must be strung up to the very highest prices. All fell out as they had foreseen; Sir Thomas was resolved that nothing of interest to the family should go into other hands, and Richard had the greatest satisfaction in seeing that his uncle would not have one cheap bargain.

"Upon my word," said he, as he heard the price at which the family pictures were being knocked down, "I shall get more good out of my ancestors thus, than I ever looked for!"

He was abundantly satisfied with the result of every day's sale; and every night he and his law friend sat down to a good supper, and drank success to the next day.

So ended the six days of the sale; and for three days more the place was thronged with people, packing and sending off their purchases. On the evening of the third day, the last waggon drove off, and Richard's man of business shook hands with him on the steps of the principal entrance, mounted his phaeton, and drove off also.

Everybody was gone; even horses and dogs were removed—all excepting the large yard-dog in his kennel; but he had changed masters—he belonged now to Sir Thomas Durant.

It wanted now but two days to the end of the year, and a rumour was in the village that Sharple had arrived in the neighbourhood. But he had not yet been seen at the Durant Arms. The thirtieth day of December was Sunday; a cold, comfortless winter Sunday—a Sunday, too, in the Christmas week; but so occupied had the mind of both Mrs. Durant and her son been of late, that,

excepting for Christmas-day making a one day's pause in the sale, the time would have been forgotten by them. Any uninterested spectator might have moralized upon the changes in human fortune, when he had thought of the Christmas that had been kept there, with spits turning, and spigots running, and guests in hall and chamber; and the solitude, and silence, and ruin that had now fallen upon everything;—the chimneys cold, the larder empty, and the inhabitants a broken household, about to leave it for ever. But nobody moralized on these things; and poor Mrs. Durant!—how changed from the high-spirited dame of the early part of our story!—sat in her small chamber, reading the service of the day to Bridget, who was now the sole remaining domestic. It was such a thing as Mrs. Durant had never done before; but in times of affliction, or of deep excitement, people naturally resort to a form, at least, of religion. Scarcely was this little rite finished, and Bridget retired to the room which served for kitchen, when Richard entered his mother's chamber and sat down beside her. There was something very peculiar in his manner; he seemed full of thought, and softened down into unusual quietness. Nothing could be more affecting than their meeting: his mother kissed his forehead and cheek, and stroked his hair as she used to do when a boy.

“Mother,” he at length said, “I am about to leave this place; I am about to leave you—you must now grant me one request.”

“What is it, dear?” asked she.

"Leave it too!" he answered.

"Never!" was her firm reply.

"What is the sense of your stopping here by yourself?" he asked.

"If that is your request," said his mother, "spare your asking; I would not grant it even on your death-bed! I know what is due to ourselves. They shall turn me from the place, before I go!"

"For this one night, then," said Richard, "sleep at the Durant Arms, or anywhere, rather than here. This is a great ghastly house; it looks desolate and dreary; I would not sleep in it myself!"

"Foolish boy!" returned his mother; "I have no fears; fire-arms I have, if need be. I am not afraid," said she, laughing. "No, no," added she, as Richard remained silent, "I will not voluntarily pass the threshold; if I did, they would enter and forcibly keep me out. Surely," said she, eyeing him with suspicion, "you are not leagued with them against me?"

"No, upon my soul!" exclaimed Richard. "My care is only about your own comfort—your own safety!"

"It is dutiful, very dutiful of you!" she said, "and I ask your pardon even for a suspicion; but my mind is made up."

"It is getting late," said he, after a pause of some seconds; "it is now dark. I sleep at the Durant Arms, and shall go by the mail to Starkey. I will wait for you there; for they will soon dis-

lodge you," said he with a smile; "very soon dislodge you!"

"And your money," asked Mrs. Durant, "is that safe?"

"I have it with me," replied he, slapping his hand on his pocket; "I shall put it in the Darlington Bank."

"Well, Heaven bless you, my own son!" said Mrs. Durant, embracing him; "Heaven bless you!—you have made me happier than I have been for many years; for oh, Richard! remember this—my happiness or my misery is in your hands!"

Richard kissed her and muttered something about his duty.

"Yes, Dick," she said, as she held his hand in both of hers, "I know you will do your duty. And as for me, I care not what I suffer, so that you prosper and are happy!"

Mrs. Durant wept; and Richard, again urging her to go, but being refused, he turned to the door to leave her: she went down stairs with him, to secure the outer door after his departure.

"I knew he had a good heart! I knew he loved me!" exclaimed the mother, with the most inexpressible satisfaction, as she again sat alone in her chamber.

Before Mrs. Durant retired for the night, Bridget informed her that Richard was not gone; he had returned, and had been re-admitted; that he desired her to go to bed, and said he should remain in the house all night. It was a new proof, Mrs. Durant thought, of his affectionate care for her;

and, at that moment, she did not seem to herself to have one sorrow on earth.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNLOOKED FOR EVENT.

It was a little past midnight when Bridget raised her head from her pillow, to listen to certain sounds that had startled her in her sleep.

"Yes!" said she, "there it is again!" and, terrified almost beyond endurance, she went from the dressing-room, where she slept, to the adjoining chamber.

Mrs. Durant, who had had many uneasy, sleepless nights of late, had been so solaced by the parting interview with her son, that she had this night slept unusually soundly.

"Lord, madam!" said the woman, shaking her in her bed; "do, pray ye, wake!"

Mrs. Durant started up, wide awake, in an instant. "What is it, Bridget?" asked she.

"Lord, madam! I don't know! but have you heard nothing?"

Mrs. Durant listened, but all was still as death.

"You'll hear it in an instant," said Bridget; "to my thinking, they're breaking in!"

Mrs. Durant now heard the sounds Bridget had spoken of, and sprung from her bed; she increased the light of the night-lamp, and, without replying, began to dress herself hastily.

"Oh, Lord, madam! there it is again!" ex-

claimed Bridget, "like breaking sticks or rotten wood! I wish I had my clothes here!"

Mrs. Durant still spoke not a word, and, fixing one loaded pistol in her belt, with the other in her hand she took up the lamp and undid the fastenings of her chamber door, Bridget this while clinging to her in the infirmity of fear.

"Let go my skirts, woman!" said her mistress.

Bridget obeyed, and Mrs. Durant advanced along the narrow passage which led from her chamber to the head of the stairs, the old attendant following in her night-gown.

When Mrs. Durant reached the open stair-case, the sounds not only became fearfully audible, but the cause intelligible also. The place was on fire! The doors of the principal apartments all opened upon the large lobby at the stairs head, and the first door that she opened showed at once the terrible extent of the fire, although as yet the flames had not burst into the apartment; but smoke was issuing through crevices of the wainscot, and even through the floor, while all around was a low roar, as of a furnace. On opening a second door, which led to a private stair-case, the flames at once burst upwards with the force of the increased draft, like immense tongues sent forth from fiery jaws, licking along the walls, and everywhere spreading into furious burning. Not one word did the strong-hearted woman utter; but, remembering that her son's chamber lay above the very rooms in which the fire was making such fearful speed, she reproached herself mentally for having been the cause of his remaining there that night,

and rushed up the stairs with the desperation of a tigress about to be robbed of her young.

Richard's door was fastened within, as she supposed; she knocked, and called frantically upon him: her voice echoed through the desolate chambers, but she received no reply: the next moment a horrible crash was heard, and the flames seemed to burst through the floor into that very chamber: it was all at once in a blaze, which shone horribly through the chinks of the door. The door, which had hitherto resisted her efforts, gave way before her desperation, and she rushed into the burning room: her feet were scorched through the soles of her shoes, and the atmosphere was stifling. In a moment, however, she saw that the room was empty: she had forgotten that the furniture had been removed for sale.

Frantic with fear of his danger, she rushed again to the stair-case, but that was all now enveloped in flame. She did not, however, pause to think of peril, but rushed down, although the flames left the smell of fire on her woollen garments.

"Oh, Madam! Madam!" exclaimed Bridget, meeting her below, "here's all Stanton, and that fellow, Sharple, swearing it's all Mr. Richard's doing! and there are constables to take him!"

The alarm-bell was ringing violently; stormy voices of angry men were sounding amid the roaring of the flames, the cracking of windows, and the crashing of falling walls and floors. The pitch-blackness of the night was illuminated for miles round; but nothing of this reached the senses of poor Mrs. Durant: she was distracted

to obtain intelligence of her son. It would have been consolation to have seen him in the hands of the constables even, but he was nowhere to be found. Sharple promised the most liberal reward to whoever might discover him, but all search was fruitless. At length, it was suggested by some one, that he might be buried under the ruins of the southern extremity of the mansion, which, with its immense stack of chimneys, had fallen to the ground.

A more terrible and determined fire never was witnessed. It was in vain that engines spouted their streams upon it. The seeds of fire seemed to have been sown over the whole place, and it was soon discovered that any attempt to arrest the conflagration would be fruitless. No attempt at rescuing the furniture and paintings could be made, so completely was the interior one mass of fire when the people arrived. Nothing was saved but the furniture in Mrs. Durant's rooms: this was removed with great speed to one of the out-buildings, which appeared beyond the reach of the fire; Anthony Sharple thinking that he was thus serving his patron.

It was a night never to be forgotten. Half the county was roused by the distant effect of the conflagration, as it was witnessed in the fearfully illuminated atmosphere. Before morning, that stately and ancient pile was merely bare and burning walls, which, in the course of the day, fell to the ground, heaping up below a pile of smoking ruins.

An express reached London that morning, with

the tidings, for Sir Thomas Durant. And in three days more, in every post-office, coach-office, and ship-office, were bills posted, offering "500*l.* reward to any one who would apprehend Richard Durant, late possessor of Stanton-Combe, who was supposed to have been instrumental in the destruction of that mansion by fire, or give information so that he might be apprehended: or 200*l.* reward to any one who would ascertain that he had perished in the flames, as some supposed."

We have said, this while, nothing whatever of Mrs. Durant. What can we say more than our readers may imagine? Her distress was of the most distracting nature: the efforts made in her own person to assist her son's deliverance, supposing he were in the burning rooms, were incredible. She ascended ladders and entered furnace-like chambers, where the stoutest-hearted men could not bear the excessive heat. And when at length no hope remained for her, although fearfully scorched in her own person, she appeared unaware of her bodily suffering, the anguish of her mind was so much greater. She was conveyed to the Durant Arms, and placed in bed.

By degrees her reason gained the mastery over her despair, and then she began to gather assurance of her son's safety. She could now understand his anxiety to remove her from the place that night. She would have died by torture, rather than have avowed the part she believed him to have had in the fire; but she began to take consolation. Anthony Sharple had declared, on oath, that he himself saw Richard Durant pass

from the southern wing of the building to that which contained his mother's apartments; and though others swore too, that they had seen him, but in the burning rooms, and that the moment before the chimneys had fallen, which made escape impossible, she yet took hope. There was no necessity, she knew, for him to remain there, unless it had been to remove her, or to assure her of his safety; she did not doubt but that, when he had seen Sharple and his myrmidons at hand, he had fled from the place, and was now in temporary concealment. This opinion was strengthened by the deposition of the landlord of the Durant Arms, who stated that Richard had left his house by mail, for the north, that very night at twelve o'clock, before the fire had burst out. The driver of the mail declared, on oath, that he had dropped the gentleman who had mounted the box that night at Stanton, at Kilhope Cross, which was the point at which a person going to Starkey would turn off from the main-road; but, being new to that line of road as driver of the mail, he could not swear to the person of Richard Durant. All this corresponded with what Richard had told his mother of his intentions; and although neither Lady Thickenisse, nor his sister, nor any person of Starkey whatever, had seen him, or had intelligence of or from him, no doubt remained in his mother's mind respecting his security.

One circumstance, however, occurred soon after, which threw all again into doubt, and filled the poor mother's heart with despair. The very ring

which Richard had worn that day, as not only his mother, but many others, could testify, was found among the ruins of that southern wing where he was stated to have been seen by so many.

It was all doubt and dreadful uncertainty.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIFE IN LONDON.

SIX months afterwards, Mrs. Durant, now to all appearance an aged, heart-broken woman, with the scars of the fearful fire upon her countenance, and her hair, which had been black as the raven's wing, now thickly sprinkled with white, was sitting in the library at Starkey. Elizabeth was beside her, her eyes fixed affectionately on her mother's countenance; she was evidently waiting for an answer, which the other was slow to give.

"Well," at length, she said, "it may be kind of Lady Thicknise to offer me the fifty pounds a year; we have been old friends, and it is nothing to her, with her fine income; and I am brought very low by many things, but—"

"Have no anxiety about me, dear mother," said Elizabeth, fearing she was experiencing the same painful anxiety which tortured her own breast. "I shall do very well: Mrs. Betty assures me of the kindness of Mrs. Franklin, and I have seen her letter myself. I shall do very well!"

"Oh no! child, no! I was not thinking of

you!" returned her mother; "though I must say you have shown no lack of affection to me since I have been here. I dare say you will do very well. But I was thinking, that, if my poor lad had been alive, he would never have let me be dependent on anybody!" And with this thought poor Mrs. Durant burst into tears. "No, no! he would never have let me want; so kind as he was! so affectionate as he was on that awful night!"

Elizabeth doubted, in her own mind, whether Richard really would have remained as dutiful and as affectionate as he appeared to have been on that particular evening to which his mother so perpetually recurred, but she would not for the world have shaken the pleasing belief.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Durant, again rousing herself from that stupor of grief into which such allusions to her son invariably threw her, "I can endure it no longer! This uncertainty will be the death of me!"

A sudden idea the next moment occurred to her, and, snatching up pen and paper, she wrote one such advertisement as the London journals contain almost daily—tell-tales of home-desolation, and of the misery of trusting and breaking hearts. In the course of the next week all England might have read the following:—

"R. D. is earnestly requested to communicate with her who loves him more than life."

For a whole week this advertisement appeared. The first thing every morning, poor Mrs. Durant, with eager eyes, and hope thrilling her heart to violent palpitation, turned to the columns of the

paper. The appeal was still there, but there was no reply.

After an interval of a week or two, the heart-broken mother made another attempt to obtain intelligence.

"If R. D. is still alive, let him answer! As he values his soul's peace, let him answer!"

Still her appeal was vain. It was like striking the rock with a feather. Oh, how blind and pitiless seemed that to which she was calling—like eternity and the grave! It was as if she sent the cries of her anguish into voiceless depths!

For three months, at distant intervals, Mrs. Durant's appeals to her son, if still living, were read in the columns of the morning papers, varied from time to time, but each one like the groans of anguish and affection. Many and many a one read those brief effusions with tearful eyes, and looked, each returning day, with tender sympathy, to recognise, if they could, some response or acknowledgment. But there was none!

At length, after three months of frightful anxiety, a post-letter was given to her. The handwriting was unknown, but the few words it contained filled her with inexpressible joy.

"R. D. is in London, and is well. Do not seek to know more."

He was, then, living! For a few moments it seemed as if this brief assurance restored the happiness of life. He was in London, and well! She fell upon her knees and returned thanks to Heaven; she called herself happy and fortunate, and, for the moment, forgot even the misery of the

hour before. Great, however, as was the worth of the assurance that he lived, much still remained behind; and, scarcely had an hour elapsed, after the receipt of the letter, than she was as restless and unsatisfied as formerly. Of his prosperity or happiness she knew nothing. He might be in prison; he might be in distress many ways, and yet be *well* in health. She was told to inquire no further. How little did he know of the insatiable yearning of a mother's heart, who could address to her these words!

London was now the goal of her desires, and she declared that if she had to seek, day by day, through the streets and alleys of that mighty city, nothing but death should stop her.

It had been decided, some months before, as we have already hinted, that Elizabeth should go to London. Good Mrs. Betty Thickniss had written on the subject to an early friend of hers, even to our Mrs. Franklin, of whose connexion with Sir Thomas Durant she was unaware. She merely knew, that at that period of her friend's life she had taken a situation, which had proved an unhappy one; and, as the two ladies' friendship was kept up only by letters, at uncertain intervals of time, Mrs. Betty had, from feelings of delicacy, forbore to question on a subject which her friend had not voluntarily introduced.

But knowing the kindness of her heart, and firmly relying on the correctness of her principles, Mrs. Betty, who was most anxious to befriend Elizabeth, and to assist her praiseworthy efforts at independence, wrote to her, and besought her

advice and co-operation. Mrs. Franklin immediately sympathized with the young lady recommended to her, not only as the god-daughter of her friend, but as the victim of her old persecutor, Sir Thomas Durant, and promised to withhold no effort in her behalf.

The journey had only been delayed in consequence of Mrs. Durant's health, and state of mind; now, however, not a moment was to be lost: she was in the utmost trepidation to be away, and, in two days, all was in readiness for their departure.

But we must not leave Starkey without mentioning one instance of good Mrs. Betty's affection and consideration. When the two ebony cabinets, which Lady Thickniss had bespoken, arrived from Stanton-Combe, after the sale, there came also an oil painting with them. This was a present for Elizabeth, from her considerate god-mother, who, out of her small income, had ordered this purchase to be made, even at the exorbitant rate Sir Thomas's agents were ready to pay. It was a fine painting of Elizabeth's father, and to her was an invaluable gift.

We may as well also mention now, what portion of Mrs. Durant's possessions, which had been rescued from the fire, ever came to her hands;—merely that which Bridget herself had saved; but that portion happened to be the most valuable—the plate and jewels, together with a chest of linen, and her mistress's clothes;—the rest fell into the clutches of Sharple, and was held securely. That oaken chest, however, which contained the

"brownie's webs," and about which poor Mrs. Durant, even in her distress for her son's life, did not lose thought, perished in the flames. The after belief of Richard's death made this appear of less importance to his mother; nay, the very fact of its having been destroyed seemed an assurance, almost, that his life was gone too. When she discovered that this belief was happily unfounded, a momentary pang crossed her heart, lest it indicated that fortune had deserted her. "But no! no!" reasoned she, giving the old tradition that second meaning which so many an augury is capable of; "the fortune of the house clearly will not abide by the intruder!"

Mrs. Franklin did not fall short of the character given of her by Mrs. Betty. Nothing could be kinder and more considerate than she was; but she herself was, to a certain degree, dependent upon her relative, Mr. Netley, and she could not do more than offer a temporary asylum to Elizabeth and her mother. But she could give sympathy and advice, and that was much to Elizabeth; for, strange as it may seem, her mother was so completely absorbed by one thought—the discovering and allying herself again to her son, that she seemed to become incapable of another idea. Mrs. Franklin's countenance and experience were therefore invaluable to her. There was another source of comfort, too—the companionship of Alice Franklin, the only young female companion Elizabeth had ever had—and that of itself was a delightful source of happiness. Alice had profited by every circumstance, favourable and unfavour-

able, and the two girls formed a friendship which was productive of benefit and happy consequences to them both. Excepting for the Franklins, the situation of both Mrs Durant and her daughter must have been pitiable and forlorn in the extreme. Although poor Mrs. Durant had said, when at a distance, that she would soon discover her son in London, the vastness of that mighty city, with all its stir and life, and its imposing circumstances both of splendour and utter wretchedness, sunk even her heart. In vain she walked the busiest streets, and threaded the densest crowds; in vain she went into resorts of the gay and happy, glancing her restless and anxious eyes over fair and noble forms: he for whom she sought was not there. Nor was he to be met with in the dens and alleys where she penetrated, fearless of injury or insult. It was a hopeless quest! She felt as if she were now too near—as if she wanted a distance and space to look around in; and again she had recourse to her correspondence through the columns of the papers.

“Richard,” said her advertisement *“your mother is near you. You are earnestly requested to communicate with her. Write to A. B., General Post-office.”*

The most unsympathizing clerks at the General Post-office learned to know the anxious and haggard countenance of the poor lady in black, who, day after day, and even twice in the day, presented herself to make inquiries.

After a week or two, the advertisement took another form. *“Has R. D. no regard for his*

anxious mother? From her he has nothing to fear. She cannot much longer sustain this suspense. Communicate through General Post-office, addressed Y. Z."

She little thought, as she presented herself again and again, with her anxious melancholy countenance, to inquire for the much-desired letter, how a hundred eyes were compassionately fixed upon her; nor how she came to be known to the common hackney-coachmen on the stand near, who pitied her as she retired each day, yet more dejected.

Elizabeth's attention and kindness to her mother were unbounded, but her mother noticed it not. Her anxiety absorbed every faculty; and, had it remained much longer to the same extent, must have ended in madness.

Mrs. Durant had accepted the offered 50*l.* a year from Lady Thickniss, "until she was provided for by her son;" for she persisted in the happy belief that Richard would joyfully find her a home and means of support. Besides this, she had only her plate and jewels, which she could not think of turning into money—they were destined for her son, for him for whom they and all her other wealth had been preserved. It was necessary, therefore, that Elizabeth did something, not only to maintain herself, but to help also to maintain her mother. What could she do? She thought of the degraded steward in the gospel, who could not dig, and was ashamed to beg, and she thought herself like him. She thought first—as all educated women who must earn their own

bread seem naturally to think of that first—that she would employ herself in education. But then, several insuperable objections stood in the way. Her education was not fashionable, nor could her accomplishments recommend her either to “mamas,” or to ladies keeping schools; nor, again, could she leave her mother in her present unhappy state: needlework she thought of too, but that she abandoned for another occupation—for one that had beguiled many a weary hour even at home—the making artificial flowers. For ten hours, therefore, each day, she sat in their small room, closely occupied, the monotony of her life diversified only by occasional walks with Alice Franklin, or by the pleasant hours which that kind-hearted girl spent beside her work-table. Mrs. Franklin, who had known hardships herself, and could therefore sympathize in those of others, took the sincerest interest in the elegant labours of their young friend. So did Nehemiah Netley. he himself had dealt in her wares, and he was a connoisseur in such things, and used not unfrequently to look in upon her.

“You are perfectly absurd, cousin Franklin,” said he, one day, when he returned to his house at Richmond; “quite absurd about that young lady, Miss Durant!”

“How so?” asked Mrs. Franklin.

“Why, giving her advice about the sale of her flowers. How should you know anything about it? But people, really, are so absurd!”

Mrs. Franklin smiled, and wished he would give his advice.

“Why, so I have,” replied he; “I looked in this morning: beautiful notion she has about her art; for I can assure you there is as much art and science, ay, and genius, too, required in the making an artificial flower, as in painting a picture!—and she is quite a gentlewoman too! Give my advice, did you say? what good would merely giving my advice do, cousin Franklin? But I did what was the right thing to do; I took a coach and a box of her flowers to my friend Horobin—capital notion has he of a flower, and the first trade in London! I had nothing to do but open my box. It was settled in a moment: she was taken into his employ in an instant, with good pay, and safe into the bargain! That’s what I call doing a thing well, cousin Franklin!”

Mrs. Franklin held out her hand to her worthy old relative, and shook his cordially, telling him that she thanked him heartily, for that Miss Durant was deserving of the zeal of all her friends.

It was in this way that, for the first six months of their London sojourn, Elizabeth laboured for her own and her mother’s support.

Poor Mrs. Durant’s attempts to discover her son had hitherto been unsuccessful, and she had again recourse to the newspapers, in the following advertisement.

“Once more a heart-broken mother appeals to her son. Let her at least know that he lives. Communicate through General Post-office, addressed to A. B.”

The very evening on which this advertisement

appeared, the woman of the house where they lodged informed them that an old gentleman wished to speak a few words with them. Supposing it to be Mr. Netley, Elizabeth went out to receive him. It was an entire stranger: he wished to see her mother.

"It is my Richard's voice!" exclaimed the mother, dashing forward, and sank at his feet, overcome by emotion.

"It is a mistake!" said Elizabeth; and the stranger repeated her words.

The door was closed, and Mrs. Durant was supported to a chair. She opened her eyes, and by a strong effort overcame the hysterical convulsion that oppressed her. "I will not be kept from him!" exclaimed she, rising and putting aside her daughter's hand; "I will not be kept back, for I know it is he!"

The stranger again protested that it was a mistake; that he merely brought a message from another party.

"Leave us together!" said Mrs. Durant to her daughter, in the old tone of command which she had so long used at Stanton-Combe, but which had of late been a stranger to her lips.

Elizabeth, who had been accustomed of old to her mother's jealous affection for her son, instantly obeyed, and Mrs. Durant not only closed but locked the door after her.

"Richard," she said, "it is vain to attempt an imposition on your mother! Thank Heaven, I see you once more!" And, spite of his disguise, she kissed his hands, and cheek, and forehead. "Oh,

my son ! my beloved son !” she exclaimed, “ why have you separated yourself from me ? Speak, and conceal nothing. I will not ask what you have done, nor where you have been ; it is enough for me that I set my eyes once more upon you !”

Richard made no other answer to these passionate appeals than by coldly remarking that, if other people’s eyes had been as sharp as her’s, he should not have been where he then was.

Although in the bitterness of her grief Mrs. Durant thought, many a time, of the reproaches she should heap upon him when they met, she was now too happy for reproaches ; she could only lavish upon him the most affectionate of caresses, and the most cordial of welcomes. She felt happier than she had done, even in her best days, at Stanton-Combe.

If she, however, could not upbraid him, he had not equal consideration for her.

“ Those advertisements of her’s,” he said, with a bitter oath, “ had been all but the cause of his detection.” It was in vain that she argued of her cruel anxiety, of her intense affection ; he only replied by charging her with folly, and by protesting that he would never reply to such appeals again. There was harshness, and the most cold selfishness in all that he said ; but his mother could not feel it as such ; she only thought that he was restored to her, and she was satisfied.

When he rose to depart, she rose also and began to put on her bonnet and cloak.

“ Where are you going ?” asked he.

“ With you !—with my own sor !” said she :

“where else should I go? I will not lose you again: henceforward we will not be parted!”

Richard dashed his hat upon the table, and swore that she was a fool.

“Heaven knows,” said his mother, “that my life is worthless without you!”

“You cannot—you shall not go with me!” he replied vehemently.

“Listen!” exclaimed she; “I swear to you, that I will ask nothing of your way of life. I will reveal nothing you would have concealed! I will not be a burden upon you! and—for a mother’s eye can see it, though it were hidden from all the world beside—Richard, you are poor! nay, start not, my poor, dear boy! I know it, I see it! There is want in your eye! Ay, ay, perhaps you sought your mother when you wanted help—when you were come to your last groat! Well, never mind! by-gones shall be by-gones! It is enough for me that I have found you; and while I have a crust of bread I will divide it with you!”

Richard appeared affected by his mother’s words. He sat down again beside her, and told her a long history. On the night of the fire, he said, he had taken his place by the north mail, but being detained longer than he expected at Stanton-Combe, he had sent his groom in his place, the man wearing his travelling dress as a disguise; when the fire had gained a head, he had, he said, hasted to his mother’s rooms, intending to remove her, but she was not there; by that time Sharple and his people were all on the spot;

and the word being given that he must be seized as the incendiary, he had kept carefully out of their view, which his perfect knowledge of the place enabled him to do. He made his escape, he said, in the early morning, to the house of Timson, with whom he had left his ring; and that, instead of going to Starkey, as he had intended, he had come to London. In London, he said, he had all kinds of misfortunes, sickness, and falling into the hands of thieves. His mother could feel nothing but compassion and love. She gave him her purse, containing five guineas—all the money she had in the world, and prayed Heaven to bless him! He then went on to tell of imprisonment in France, and escape there for his life; and excused his long inattention to her, on the plea of being abroad. He appeared ingenuous and candid, and his mother believed and pitied him. One only request, he said, he would make from her, that she would not seek to know where he was concealed; but he promised most solemnly never again to absent himself long from her; and, in the faith of his promise, she suffered him to depart.

CHAPTER XIV.

REAPING.

BUT our readers have a right to question how much of Richard's story was true. They shall know. As he stated, he had done what was in his power to remove his mother from the burning

house of Stanton-Combe; he entered her apartments at the very time when she was forcing her way through fire and danger to his chamber. The arrival of Sharple and the constables prevented his making further search after her, or even communicating with Bridget. He made his escape to the house of Timson, before day-break, where he remained concealed for several days, no way displeased to find the idea prevalent of his having perished in the fire. He submitted the ring he was in the daily habit of wearing to the action of fire, which he ordered Timson to bury among the ruins, and afterwards produce as found. Timson did so, and received, in process of time, the 200*l.* reward from Sir Thomas Durant.

After Richard had been concealed with Timson for nearly a week, he assumed the disguise of a countryman, and set out for London. The greatest precaution, however, was needful, for at that time the country was all alive in search of him, 500*l.* being offered, as we before stated, for his apprehension, supposing him still alive. The hardships of this journey were great, for it was in the winter season, and he was afraid of entering large towns, or almost of travelling by day-light; but his life was in his hand, and there was no alternative.

Spite of his apparent poverty, he entered London with fifteen thousand pounds in his pocket. This money caused him no inconsiderable difficulty: he dared not put it in any bank, lest it should lead to the natural inquiry, how a person of his appearance had become possessed of so large a sum; and at the same time he was afraid to

carry it about him, lest he should be robbed or lose it. Never was money a burden to him before; he longed, even at the risk of detection, to assume his own character, and to spend freely. At length, tired out with concealment and unwilling thrift in London, he went to Paris. Paris was then all alive with her growing liberalism, and the English were among her most honoured citizens. Richard Durant, however, had not gone to Paris for the indulgence of free opinions, either in religion or politics—but that he might freely spend his money. He assumed the name of Colville, established himself in one of the principal hotels, hired servants in plenty, dressed handsomely, and enjoyed himself to his heart's content. Ere long, the politics of Paris took a turn, and that edict was published which required all foreigners, and the English especially, to leave France. It was vain to think of remaining longer in Paris; he could not speak a word of French, and his appearance was not only English, but anti-democratic in the extreme; he had too much money, which he wanted to spend, to be contented with the plain hair and shoe-ties of the Rolands. It was dangerous at that moment to be rich in Paris; an arrest was signed, and the gend'armes waited outside his door, to drag him before the most bloody of tribunals.

But good fortune befriended him. An old French waiter at the hotel apprised him of his danger, lent him a suit of clothes, and concealed him for two days in the cupboard of a larder, assisting him afterwards to make his final escape

Richard saved his money, but his personal property, to a considerable amount, was confiscated to the national use. He escaped to Boulogne, and thence to England. Here his life was again in danger; but, as he had supported the character of an old man with great success, he determined to maintain it still, as producing the most complete disguise. Hundreds of English had fled, like himself, from Paris; therefore, this circumstance excited no surprise. He exchanged at Dover the dress of the old French waiter for that of an old English gentleman. He wore a powdered wig, shaved off his bushy whiskers, assumed a slouching gait and stooping shoulders, and had the satisfaction of imposing even upon his tailor; he dropped also the more remarkable name of Colville, and adopted that of Simpson, as suitable to his new character. He laughed heartily, as he surveyed himself in a large mirror, to see the complete metamorphosis: he thought he might defy Sir Thomas Durant and Sharple himself.

By degrees he ventured out of his London lodgings by day-light, and then to public places; at length, in the wantonness of complete success he seated himself by Sharple in a box at the theatre, nor was even suspected.

In the meantime Mrs. Durant's advertisements after him had given him the most serious cause of apprehension. True, the promised reward had been given to Timson, on the discovery of the ring; and the opinion of his having perished was generally entertained; and so long as people

adopted that belief, he was safe. Nothing, therefore, could be more appalling to him than his mother's repeated appeals to him; and, for a long time, he determined not to reply—which was but to her the confirmation of the general belief. At length, however, partly through pity of her undoubted distress on his account, and partly to silence her, that the subject at least might die in the public mind, he wrote that letter to his mother which she received at Starkey, and which had an effect contrary to what he intended. It brought her to London.

Richard, in the character of Mr. Simpson, had become fearless of detection; he had accordingly taken a house in Abingdon-street, Westminster, which he had furnished handsomely, and where he lived in a manner much more accordant with the age and temper of Richard Durant, than of old Mr. Simpson. He had his acquaintance, male and female, and drove in his handsome phaeton to the parks, and to Epsom and Ascot races; for the old spirit was not dead in him. Yet all this while he never forgot that his life depended on his prudence; and while he spent freely, and lived indulgently, he maintained his incognito with the utmost care. No one individual was made party to his secret; and he often was greatly amused by the discussion which his own exploits, character, and supposed death, occasioned among his friends, and even at his own table.

The first intimation he had of his mother's arrival in London was from the newspaper advertisements, and it caused him infinite chagrin.

He swore that she would be his ruin; and he vowed with himself, that, although he had assured her of his being alive, he would now sink his identity as much as if he were indeed dead, in the hope that after a few months' unsuccessful sojourn in London, she would again return to Starkey. For several months he persevered in his silence, and would, no doubt, have persisted in it much longer, but for an unexpected circumstance. He was robbed to a large amount by his valet, whom he dared not prosecute, lest it should lead to his own detection. He had, moreover, lived with the most reckless disregard of consequences; had frequented gaming-houses, and been fleeced by sharpers more cunning than himself. To use a homely phrase, Richard was "bringing his ninepence to a groat."

Anxieties for the future now, for the first time, took hold of him; he would fain have disentangled himself of his growing difficulties, but forethought and economy had never been habits of his mind. It was but little more than twelve months since the burning of Stanton-Combe; he had then nearly fifteen thousand pounds; now there remained scarcely one. The money had vanished like smoke; it had run through his hands like water, and he cursed himself as the most unlucky of men.

It was at this moment that he cast his eye on his mother's last advertisement. He had now less objection than formerly to make himself known to her; for when poverty came upon him, as an armed man, as it seemed likely enough soon to

do, he knew that his mother would not let him be reduced to extremity. Some little he thought of what account he must render of the spending of his money; that, however, was easy; he told his story in brief, as we have heard, and his mother did not reproach him, but was filled with compassion. Of his home, in Westminster, he said nothing, and bound his mother also by a solemn promise, not to inquire after his residence.

After having made himself known to his mother and sister, he paid them repeated visits, always, however, in the evening, and with great precaution. Mrs. Durant, who was possessed with the idea of his suffering from want, supplied him from time to time with the money which she received from Lady Thickniss; and even when that failed, with jewels and plate, which she besought him to turn into money. Elizabeth, too, out of her small earnings, bestowed upon him the occasional guinea which otherwise would have helped to replenish her scanty wardrobe.

Mrs. Durant had kept her promise to him religiously; she had neither inquired from him, nor used any means to learn where his residence might be: it came, however, to her knowledge one day most unexpectedly. Elizabeth had made a small spray of summer flowers for a lady in Westminster, and, as the evenings were then long and fine, she had invited her mother to walk with her to take them home. She consented. On their way they met the Franklins, who were going to hear evening service in the Abbey, and invited Elizabeth and her mother to accompany them.

Mrs Durant declined, but offered to leave the spray of flowers for her daughter, that she might not be deprived of a pleasure—for pleasure to her was indeed a rarity, as her mother acknowledged. Greatly must Mrs. Durant have been changed and humbled, since her proud days at Stanton-Combe, to make such an offer as this to her daughter; but she *was* changed. Sorrow changes us even more than time.

On her return she happened to lose her way, and got into Abingdon-street. But the street she knew not, nor inquired after at the moment, for she saw an object that sunk all other thoughts and cares—her own son, in his usual dress as Mr. Simpson, standing on the steps of a house, where he rang, and familiarly entered as at his own home. “Who lives at No. —?” asked she, with scarcely articulate voice, from the sweeper of a crossing hard by, the man replied that it was “one Mr. Simpson, an old man, but a gay one!” “A lodger, he is, I suppose?” said she, willing to hope the deceit less than she at first imagined. “Oh, no!” said the man, “he has the whole house to himself!”

Mrs. Durant at the moment felt that she would rather have found her son asking alms in the street, than thus enjoying luxury and comfort which was only evidence of the selfish imposition he had practised on her. An indignant sense of having been a dupe stung her to the heart, and she determined at once to present herself before him in that very house, the knowledge of which he had so carefully kept from her. She knocked at the

door, and was informed by the servant who had just before admitted her son, that "Mr. Simpson was not at home."

"Mr. Simpson," returned she peremptorily, "has but this moment entered."

The servant persisted that she was mistaken: "his master," he said, "would not return that night."

"Tell me no lies, sirrah!" said she, assuming at once the stern authority of the mistress of Stanton-Combe; "I have seen your master within these three minutes admitted by yourself."

The servant did not reply, but looked puzzled. "Give him this ring," she continued, drawing one well known to her son from her hand, "and bid him admit me!"

The servant received the ring, but hesitated.

"I wait here," said she, entering the hall, and seating herself; "you go and do my bidding!"

Full of curiosity, and wondering what all this meant, the servant carried the ring to his master. Richard was sitting at that moment, with four of his friends, at a table covered with a plentiful repast. The servant presented the ring, saying it was sent in by a lady who demanded to see him. "A most queen-like summons, truly!" exclaimed his friends, laughing, and began merrily to interrogate the servant as to what was the lady's seeming.

Richard said not a word in reply, but, dropping the ring into his waistcoat pocket, bit his lip and went out. It was a rencontre he was not prepared for. He thought, for one moment, that he

would deny his own identity, but the next, he remembered his mother's ready forgiveness, and determined to brave it out.

Mrs. Durant, who had listened for the servant's return, instantly recognised the step of her son on the stairs; she opened, therefore, the door of a lower room, as if she herself had been mistress of the house, and, with an air of offended dignity, motioned for him to enter also. He did so, and she closed the door upon them. Something he said of the prodigal son, and hastened to embrace her. She had never repelled his embrace before, but at that moment she did it.

"This is a discovery, Richard," she said, "that I did not expect to make!"

A base lie sprung to his lips; he said he was but a lodger, and that the house was none of his.

"Unworthy young man!" exclaimed she, with singular severity, "may God forgive you for the falsehood you have spoken!"

Richard, unabashed, persisted that he had not deceived her, and that he was suffering poverty.

"Poverty!" she exclaimed, glancing upon his dress; "does this look like poverty? Look at my shoes; see, they are patched and cobbled! why have I worn such? Because you received the solitary guinea; because you received also that which could be turned into money, and I could ill spare, on the plea of your want!"

Richard tried to excuse himself by urging the need there was to keep all knowledge of himself from every one.

"That is no argument," replied she, "for, in

health or in sickness, in want or in prosperity, what had you to fear from me? Oh, Richard!" continued she, after a moment's pause, in which he said nothing, "I would rather have found you wanting bread, than have come thus upon your concealed luxury! Heaven forgive you! for you have cruelly deceived, and even despoiled, the kindest of mothers!" And she wept bitterly.

"Madam!" exclaimed he, as she again broke forth with passionate upbraidings, "silence! or you will betray me! They who were above stairs with me, and my very servants, may be listening—I shall be betrayed!"

"Fool!" returned she, "to have put your life in hazard of strangers; far better to have trusted your mother!"

"Silence! silence!" said Richard, speaking in an under tone, but in his own voice; "silence, I command—and leave the house! I cannot have my safety thus endangered!"

"I will go!" returned she; "but oh! Richard! this I have not deserved!"

"Not another word!" said he, taking her by the arm, and hurrying her to the outer door. The door was closed upon her, and she stood for two seconds upon the steps, that she might control the emotion which wrung her heart almost to breaking. An hour afterwards, as she was on her way home, not pondering on, but hurrying over in her own mind this strange interview with her undutiful son, she remembered that she had come away without her ring.

When Richard returned to his friends, he spoke

of his visitor as insane, and reproached his servant for admitting her; and thus the affair passed off with them. It however hurried the day which he had seen approaching—the day when he must sink a few steps lower in life. He secured all his valuables which were portable, and had them secretly conveyed to lodgings more accordant with his diminishing means; and on a certain Monday morning, about a month after his mother's visit, went away, leaving his servants and his landlord to settle between themselves which had best claim to his goods, seeing they had both lawful claims upon his purse.

He did not doubt but that his mother was grievously hurt and offended; but as he had never learned to spare her feelings, he could not be expected to be much concerned on that account now. His only determination regarding her was, that he would keep out of her way; and if he did that only long enough, she would be willing, he knew, to forget and forgive when they met.

In the meantime, although confidence was growing between Elizabeth and her mother; Mrs. Durant carefully kept from her knowledge everything to the disadvantage of her son. Not a word did she say of the discovery she had made; and the poor girl attributed her pale and haggard countenance, at first, to the fatigue of an unusual walk; and when, afterwards, she discovered that her mother suffered from restless nights, and that something seemed to be oppressing her mind by day, she strove all in her power to amuse her, and stole many an hour from her needful labour, to

read to her, or to walk out with her. It was no wonder, she thought, that this altered way of life produced such effects: she therefore proposed that they should leave their city lodgings and go into the suburbs, or, better still, to Richmond, where her mother might have the comfort of friendly neighbours. To this proposal, however, Mrs. Durant invariably answered that she would never expose Richard to the danger of being suspected; besides, how could he find them if they changed their dwelling unknown to him?

It was not long before there appeared a sufficient cause for Mrs. Durant's anxiety, in the unusually long absence of her son. Richard understood his mother's heart perfectly, when he said that if he kept out of her way she would be soon ready to forget and forgive; by degrees resentment faded before affection, and with affection came all the old anxiety. She therefore set off again to Westminster, in order merely to pass his door, and so judge by the exterior of his residence, how it went with him. He had then been gone from his house two or three weeks, and new residents were there, but externally there was no change. At the moment she passed by, a fat female servant was buying a ballad from a ballad-monger at the area-steps, and a chariot was just driving away from the door. It contained her son, she had no doubt. A sense of injury again passed over her mind, but it died away in unspeakable sorrow, and she returned home with her usual aching heart.

Again and again she took the same long walk,

merely to assure herself that all was well with him; and month and after month wore on in the same melancholy way. At length she found the window-shutters closed, the door-steps soiled by frequent foot-prints, straw and litter lying within the area, and a paper in the lower window, announcing that the house was to be let.

Was it possible that Richard was dead? The idea entered her heart like the point of a dagger, and she leant against a lamp-post, to save herself from falling. A glass of water was offered her by a poor woman who sold fruit at a stall on the pavement. Mrs. Durant spoke of the heat of the weather, and a sudden faintness which it had occasioned, and then asked her benefactress "if there had not been a sale at No. —?"

"Why, ma'am, that's, as one may say, a very unlucky house! There was an execution for rent, as took away all the goods, the day before yesterday! I hates them executioners, ma'am! Even the very children's beds were taken from under them. Landlords, ma'am, have no hearts!"

"Children!" exclaimed Mrs. Durant, somewhat relieved, in the hope that she had mistaken the number; "there were no children; Mr. Simpson was unmarried!"

"Oh! ma'am!" replied the woman, "Mr. Simpson's been gone this half-year; stick and stone, his goods were sold up last quarter: I always took him for a raffish sort of a —— but, la! ma'am, are you ill again?"

"No, no," returned Mrs. Durant, supporting herself by the iron railing against which the

woman sat; "I am not ill; but this Mr. Simpson, where is he now?"

"Nobody knows!" said the fruitseller.

"Perhaps in jail!" sighed Mrs. Durant.

"Likely enough, ma'am," returned the woman, "for his credit was none of the best before he left here."

Mrs. Durant made no further inquiries, but with anxiety in her countenance, that attracted the eyes of many a passer-by, bent her steps homeward.

Elizabeth had never inquired what was the cause which every now and then took her mother from home; she believed it had reference to her brother; and, as it appeared to be purposely kept from her, she respected the secrecy.

It was later than ordinary, on this particular evening, when Mrs. Durant returned home. Her daughter met her, as usual, at the head of the stairs, but there was a peculiarity in her manner which excited her mother's attention; she was, more than ordinarily affectionate: the truth was, she had painful news to communicate; but the first glance at her mother's agitated countenance led her to suspect that she was no stranger to it.

"So you have seen Richard, then?" asked Elizabeth, in this belief.

"Good Heavens! no!" exclaimed her mother; "but what do you know of him?"

"He has been here," returned she.

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Durant; "then he is not in jail! But quick, tell me all!"

"He came," replied Elizabeth, scarcely re-

pressing her tears, "to ask relief from us. He has been ill, he says, and looks miserably poor!"

"Oh! my unhappy boy!" exclaimed his mother; "where is he, for I will go to him to-night!" and she again threw on her cloak.

"That is impossible," said Elizabeth, rising to detain her, "for I know not where he is, nor yet do I know the circumstances which led to his present distress; but of its reality I cannot doubt. Poor fellow!" said she, again weeping, "I should not have known him scarcely, for sickness and poverty have sorely changed him!"

More than the enduring strength of Mrs. Durant's old affection had now returned. "He will not fail in duty to me now," said she, "for they to whom much is forgiven, the same love much; we shall be happier than we have been before!" And night and day she had no thought but how she might benefit him.

It was not long before Richard again made his appearance, for he was now reduced to poverty—to the want of bread, and even the shelter of a roof. He dared not, he said, ask for employment, lest it should lead to questions that would occasion his detection. It was equally dangerous for him to be seen frequently at the home of his mother and sister; they had taken no means to conceal themselves from public knowledge, and with them, therefore, he was in danger. He bewailed his fate with the most abject spirit, and called upon his mother to devise aid for him. No means of saving him suggested itself to her, but the removing from their present lodgings, assuming for

themselves a false name, and taking Richard to live with them.

They removed, accordingly, to a small house at Holloway, and Elizabeth excused the removal to her friends, the Franklins, on the plea of her mother's health and comfort. Mrs. Durant and her son assumed the every-day name of Jones, he personating, as formerly, the character of an elderly man.

"It required more than Elizabeth's former efforts to earn what was additionally needful for the maintenance of a third person; but as her brother professed himself grateful, and willing in any way to assist her, she never complained. Richard could not help her in her own peculiar and delicate art; but one thing he could do, he could carry her weekly work home to Horobin's, and thus save her time and fatigue, now that they lived so far from the city. She received her wages monthly, and at the month's end she herself went to receive a larger sum than ordinary, for she had worked more industriously than ever before. What was her inexpressible chagrin, therefore, to learn that her messenger had received it that very morning! She concealed her feelings, and, filled with the most uneasy suspicion, returned home. Richard made no attempt to deny it: he was pressed, he said, by one single debt; he feared a prison; and, with the money in his pocket, he could not resist thus applying it. Elizabeth said that it was both selfish and dishonest; that he at least should have asked her leave; and that, in twelve months, she could not make up the loss by

extra work; but she never told her mother: and, as Richard himself appeared humbled and penitent, and promised not to offend again, could he but regain her confidence, she at length gave it, that he might at least have the means of deserving it. She worked harder than ever; her mother was out of health and spirits, and the poor girl thought, if she could only raise ten pounds, and send her to the sea-side for a couple of weeks, it might be the means of restoring her. Never were artificial flowers made so assiduously before: she even made a vain attempt to instruct her brother in cutting the forms of leaves and petals, so that she might realize her little scheme before the year was too late. Richard took in her flowers now twice a week, for they were in great demand; and as this first pleasure seemed about to be realized, she even fancied herself happy.

When the month was nearly completed, she was surprised one day by a visit from Nehemiah Netley. It was now long since she had seen him, or any of her Richmond friends, for all London lay between them; and friends so situated soon find that it is as easy to visit on opposite sides of a county as on opposite sides of the great city. Mr. Netley looked hurried and angry as he entered the little parlour in which Elizabeth sat at work, and in which Richard also lay half asleep on a sofa.

"Oh!" said he, entering, and then drawing back, as he caught sight of Richard.

Elizabeth rose from her work, and went to the door.

"Who is this Mr. Jones?" asked he, abruptly without any salutation, the moment she closed the door of the other little parlour, into which she took him; "not a husband, I hope!"

"No, indeed, sir," replied Elizabeth, blushing.

"Who then is he?" asked Mr. Netley.

"He is," replied she, "a relation, who has fallen into distress: but why do you inquire?"

"Why do I inquire, Miss Durant!" answered Mr. Netley, growing angry; "why, indeed! for he seems a good-for-nothing vagabond! Do you know that you need not make any more flowers for Horobin? Nay, never look at me in that way. I say, you need not make any more flowers for Horobin—and that's plain English, is it not?"

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Elizabeth.

"Did not Horobin order that that fellow Jones should not again come about his place?" asked the old man; "and yet you must send him there twice every week. I did not bespeak Horobin's custom on these terms."

Elizabeth heaved a deep sigh—for she knew that her brother had again deceived her—and dropped into a chair. Mr. Netley sat down beside her; "I have a shrewd guess, Miss Durant," said he, "who this Mr. Jones may be: he is your brother!"

Elizabeth started, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"He is your brother," the old gentleman continued, "but I shall not betray you: I like you too well for that: but you have done foolishly—all women do foolishly, when their hearts are

concerned—whether it be for a lover or a brother! But I shall not betray you! And I'll tell you what you must do: you must go home with me; I am come all the way from Richmond on purpose!"

"I cannot leave my mother; indeed, my dear sir, I cannot!" said Elizabeth.

"As you please," returned he; "but this I can tell you—you have done your last work for Horobin. You'll have a dismissal to-day. Jones was there last night:—and so you never heard of it?"

Elizabeth looked greatly dismayed, and said that she had not. At that moment the postman's knock was heard, and she received the letter from Horobin.

"You ought to have had more sense than to have run yourself into this dilemma!" said Mr. Netley, as Elizabeth dropped the letter from her hand, "but you must decide; for let me tell you, I am not the only one who suspects Jones to be your brother; and if the idea once gets to Sharple and Sir Thomas, the Bow-street fellows will be upon him instantly!"

Elizabeth proposed to call her mother; and, as he saw no objection to this, it was done; she obtaining, however, a promise from him, that her mother should know nothing of the injury Richard had done her; "for," said she, "there will be sorrow enough without this being added."

On the first mention of Mr. Netley's suspicion respecting the person of Jones, Mrs. Durant made up her mind to instant flight with her son; and,

in order that her daughter might not be without a home and protectors, she insisted upon her accepting Mr. Netley's offer, in the firm belief that she possessed the means of providing a comfortable maintenance for herself. The business was soon settled, and Mr. Netley gave Elizabeth till evening, to make preparations for her removal, at which time he promised to return for her.

Mrs. Durant was deeply affected on parting with her daughter, whose worth and affection had been made known to her under such trying circumstances. She shed tears, and embraced her tenderly. "God bless you," she said; "I shall often think of you—for you have been a good girl!"

The five pounds which Elizabeth had earned and put by, she now prayed her mother to accept; but this she would not do. "No, child!" said she, with tears in her eyes, "put it out of my sight—I never thought to have been thus affected!—put it by; and keep this brooch for my sake!" said she, taking out the one she was wearing; "it will not be an unlucky gift to you, though it has a pin in it; but I have lost my best ring, or that should have been yours instead. Now Heaven bless you! there is no knowing what may happen before we meet again."

Before Mr. Netley again made his appearance, Mrs. Durant had regained her wonted composure; but it was with a long and earnest gaze that she watched the hackney-coach which contained Mr. Netley and her daughter, drive away from the door.

CHAPTER XV.

REAPING, CONTINUED.

WE must now advance two years in our story, and we shall find Elizabeth Durant, patient and industrious as we left her, pursuing her humble avocation still; for, through Mr. Netley's interference, she had long been restored to the employment of Mr. Horobin. She was now four-and-twenty, and, for anything she could discover, a life of labour lay before her. It would have touched any kind heart that even had not known her history, to have seen one like her, capable of every enjoyment of intellect and taste, yet bound down by the necessity of her circumstances, to the most incessant occupation. Few pleasures—such, at least, as the wealthy and the gay call pleasure—was she able to enjoy, for she had neither time nor money to spend. But there was the almost daily intercourse with her kind friends, the Franklins, for she had a lodging near them; there was the pleasant evening and Sunday stroll in the park at Richmond, and on the terrace, and occasionally a sail on the Thames; kind letters, too, from dear Mrs. Betty Thicknise, who never could forsake her, and that internal consciousness of duty faithfully performed, both to God and man, which is the sure reward of the right-doer, and which is to the moral being like sound health to the body. This was the bright side of her life; but there was a dark side also. Her mother had

assured her at parting, that she would write often. It was more than Elizabeth expected; but she hoped, at all events, to have continued knowledge of her residence and of her circumstances, that, if need were, she might administer aid or comfort. She had received but two letters, and those within the first six months after their separation. The first was dated from Greenwich, and was short, but not unsatisfactory: it spoke of her improved health, and assured her of her comfort; it stated also, that Richard had never failed in his duty, and that, please God there was peace with France, she proposed their removing there, as living would be cheap, and Richard might there find employment, which he could not well do in London.

The second letter was written five months afterwards; it was dated, but the address had been so carefully crossed and scored over, that she could not make it out. This was of itself a painful circumstance; there was something to conceal: it said nothing also of "comfort," or of "Richard's dutiful behaviour;" and excused long silence by complaints of "ill-health and want of spirits." There was everything in the letter to excite uneasiness, if not alarm. After that time, not a word of intelligence was received, either from Richard or her mother. It seemed as if the great gulf of London had swallowed them up and Elizabeth experienced anxiety little inferior to that of her mother, when first seeking after her son.

Month after month went on, till two years had

elapsed. At that time Elizabeth received an order to make some flowers for a noble lady in one of the fashionable squares, and was desired to go in person, that she might receive a quantity of hot-house flowers, which she was to imitate. In returning home, fearing lest the flowers should be injured, she called a coach from a stand in Oxford-street. No waterman was at hand to open the door, and the driver dismounted for that purpose; their eyes met—a pang thrilled through her heart, for the man surely was her brother!—muffled up and disguised; but through all, and more, through poverty and degradation, and traces of low vice, she recognised the countenance too well. She could scarcely articulate her directions, and fixed, without questioning him, her eyes inquiringly on his face: he only returned an unpleasant wink, and then mounted his box, leaving her in the most painful suspense. Could it indeed be Richard?—If so, how hopelessly fallen!—and her mother—what might not be her fate in this horribly downward course! She felt almost inclined to stop the coach, and question him by the way; but an undefined fear crept over her—a dread both of him, and of what she might have to learn. She remembered, with the greatest satisfaction, that she had ordered him to drive to Mr. Netley's; and when there, without venturing another glance on the countenance so painfully interesting, she begged him to wait till she fetched him the fare from within, intending hastily to consult with her friends, to whom all her anxieties were known. No sooner, however,

was she within doors, than he mounted the box, and drove off without his fare. That was alone confirmation.

Good Mr. Netley, as soon as he had heard the circumstance, set off to London to speak with him himself, for Elizabeth had taken the number. The coach, however, was not upon the stand, nor could the other hackney-coachmen give any information respecting him: he had not been many days among them, but had come there, they said, from the stand near Vauxhall-bridge. That was all they knew. The proprietor of the coach knew nothing more. The man, he said, went by the name of Walker; but where he lived, or what was his character, he knew not:—so that he got his coach-hire, that was all his concern. Mr. Netley said he would wait till the coach came in, even if it were past midnight. It was brought in about eleven o'clock by another person, who had been employed, he said, by Walker for that purpose, and that Walker would not take the coach again. Richard, then, was providing against inquiries; and Mr. Netley could only return with this unsatisfactory information.

One fact, however, was ascertained—Richard was now the driver of a hackney-coach.

By swift degrees he had sunk lower and lower, dragging after him his devoted mother, who, by this time, had been despoiled of all her personal possessions, and subsisted alone on Lady Thickenisse's bounty; yet through all she clung to him; "for who," said she, "would stand by him, if I deserted him?"

Poor Mrs. Durant! Did she ever think of her proud days, when they rode together over the broad lands of his fathers, her heart swelling with exultation, because she was the mother of a fair boy!

"God help us!" exclaimed Mrs. Durant—squalidly dressed, and with a haggard countenance, as Richard, on this very night, was brought to his home in White Chapel, miserably drunken, and laid on his bed by two of his pot-companions—"Heaven help us! What a beast he makes of himself!" added she, when they were left alone together. "I need not have cooked him this nice chop, which should have been my dinner, had I known that he would have come home thus, after all his promises." And Mrs. Durant took up the covered dish from the fire, and began deliberately to remove the supper-table, which she had spread for his coming. "It is no use my sitting down to eat," said she, "for I could not touch a morsel now! Heaven help me!" and she sate down and wept.

The drunken man lay in heavy sleep, almost like death, upon the low bedstead in the room, and his mother, after she had given way to a paroxysm of weeping, took his hat from the floor, where it had been dropped, brushed it neatly, and placed it on the table, and then proceeded to take off his shoes, and loosen his cravat—heaving bitter sighs the while, upbraiding him, and bewailing herself; for she was not speaking before witnesses. When all this was done, and his head laid, as she thought, easily on the pillow, she left

him with his clothes on, and went to her own comfortless bed.

Although Mr. Netley was prevented, by Richard's caution, from discovering him at that time, he did not lose sight of his quest. To an idle man like him, who, nevertheless, liked to be busy, any occupation was a blessing; and, estimating the high principle and industry of Elizabeth Durant as he did, he was the most zealous of champions in her cause. It became a habit, therefore, with the good old man, to go to town three or four times a week, merely to make silent observations on the drivers of hackney-coaches; not doubting but if Richard remained among them, he would sooner or later be discovered.

One day Mr. Netley was walking leisurely up Bridge-street, Blackfriars, looking, as usual, at the stand of coaches. One particular driver, in a long drab coat, heavily caped, was rubbing the tarnished door-handle of an ill-conditioned coach, when a tall elderly woman, meanly dressed and meagre-looking, crossed off the pavement, where she had been standing some time, and slowly went up to him. She spoke to him; he still rubbed upon the door handle, without regarding her, and then went to the other side, where she followed him. Mr. Netley also crossed the street at the same time, partly for occupation, and partly to see how the two went on. The woman continued to speak earnestly, but in a low voice, to which the man replied by a few positive words, pushing her from him at the same time. The woman became more urgent, and the man more angry, and, at length,

dragging down his whip from the coach-box, he seemed to menace her with the handle.

"Who is that fellow?" asked Nehemiah Netley, from a waterman who stood at the corner of Bride-lane, and was looking on.

"The greatest reprobate on the stand, sir," replied he.

"And the woman?" asked Mr. Netley.

"His mother, sir, I take it," replied the waterman; "they often quarrels, I've heard. She has a sort of annuity that he can't get hold of—that's what they quarrels about mostly."

"What is his name?" asked Mr. Netley; but the waterman's answer was not heard, for Mr. Netley beheld a sight which roused his indignation, and arrested his entire attention. The hackney-coach driver struck his mother; a crowd rushed up, crying shame upon him; the woman tried to avoid the blows, but the man was transported by rage, and the more the spectators exclaimed against him, the more violent he became. There was no street-police in London in those days, and, before a constable was summoned, the poor woman was down upon the pavement, and, as Nehemiah Netley himself witnessed, was even kicked by her brutal son; by which means she fell down the steps of an area, and was taken up insensible. The general feeling is seldom wrong. A sentiment of execration was uttered by the whole crowd upon the inhuman wretch, who now endeavoured to shake himself loose of the angry populace that was closing upon him. The spectacle, however, of the body, bleeding and insen-

sible, seemed to restore him to his senses; and he began to mutter that he had not intended so much; but that her temper was beyond mortal endurance. But the public indignation would not admit his excuses—a constable was at hand, and, by order of all the bystanders, he was taken into custody, and hurried away to Guildhall, where the city magistrate was then sitting, attended by a large crowd, who supported the ill-used and still insensible woman, as evidence against her son; and followed by many most respectable witnesses, among whom was Mr. Netley, all impatient for the punishment of the offender.

It was not until she was placed before the magistrate that she recovered her senses; and then, although unable to move, and suffering excruciating pain—for her leg was broken by the fall—she refused to complain of, or even to admit, ill-usage on the part of her son. The utmost astonishment filled the court, and, at first, she was thought to be raving: but she was firm in her assertion, begging earnestly to be removed: she was ill, she said, very ill, as they might see, and she had fallen by accident. The prisoner she admitted to be her son, and that he had been angry; that they had had a quarrel in the morning, but he was not in the habit of striking her. In vain witnesses pressed forward, angry at her pertinacity, to bear testimony to the ill-treatment and blows which they had witnessed. It was all mistaken, she declared; he never struck her when she was down; and that she had fallen into the area in trying to disengage herself from the crowd.

The indiscriminating many, who had followed her to Guildhall, impatient to avenge her cause, now turned their anger upon her, believing her to be drunk; but those who understood human nature, saw affection, strong as instinct the miserable mother would not criminate her son; and they, if they blamed, pitied her at the same time. The son stood dogged and sullen, turning, by his hardened demeanour, all hearts against him; but since the injured party denied any charge against him, he was dismissed, but not without a severe reprimand. A reprimand was also given to the unhappy mother; but she did not hear it. The pain of the broken limb, which she had endured without complaint, whilst her son appeared in danger, now overcame her fortitude, and she sank back in the witness-box insensible. In that state she was carried to the hospital.

Such was the deplorable history which Nehemiah Netley related to Elizabeth. There was no doubt who the parties really were; the name also was given as Walker. Early the next morning Mr. Netley obtained an order for his friend, Miss Browne—for it was considered needful to conceal her name—to be admitted to the hospital. The surgeon said he would allow no one to see the patient in question, for she was in extreme danger; but, at length, won by Elizabeth's earnest entreaties and tears, he yielded so far as to allow her a distant view of the patient in bed. What a doleful thing it was to look along that line of hospital-beds, each one containing its unhappy and suffering tenant! How much more doleful to

discover among those tenants a heart-broken mother! It was not easy to recognise the countenance, pale and haggard, with sunken, closed eyes and grey and matted hair; yet the recognition was made. Elizabeth sank upon her knees, where she stood, and, covering her face with her hands, prayed God to have mercy on them.

She took lodgings in the neighbourhood of the hospital, that she might be near. Fever and inflammation seized on the patient, and the surgeon gave but slight hopes of her recovery. Elizabeth could only be admitted for a short time to the hospital each day, and was only allowed a distant glance. It was too little for her affection. Female nurses were in the room, and from their hands her mother received aid: she could do more for her than any of these, and, with tears she besought the benevolent surgeon to accept her as hospital-nurse, that she might be present day and night by her mother's bed. The good man was moved; he had witnessed all kind of physical suffering, and was callous to it; but this devotion of filial love affected him, and with tears in his eyes he gave his consent, on one condition only, that she should wear a common dress and linen cap, and be no way remarkable to the eye of the patient; and also that she should not make herself known to her mother, without his permission.

Elizabeth bound her long black hair up tightly under a linen cap, assumed the most humble of garbs, and with a patience and tenderness that

never was surpassed, waited by the bed of her mother. The fever was high, and delirium came on, and the frantic words of the poor sufferer were heart-rending: now appeals to her son; now terrors of his detection and disgrace; and then cries for mercy, as if she imagined some scene of violence. Fortunately nobody took notice of her ravings; there were too many scenes of suffering constantly occurring within those walls, for individual cases to attract attention. Elizabeth never left her mother's bed-side; and at length, by such tender, incessant care as hospital patients rarely receive, had the satisfaction of learning that the worst was over, and if the patient could be kept perfectly tranquil, her recovery might be hoped for.

A month afterwards, Mrs. Durant, who was now removed into a convalescent ward of the hospital, was waiting anxiously one evening for an answer to a letter which she had the day before written to her daughter at Richmond, informing her of her sad state in this hospital; and, without mentioning her son in the remotest manner, begging that she would come and see her, when Elizabeth, in her usual walking dress, entered the room.

"I knew you would come!" said she, holding out her hand and bursting into tears, thinking instantly how different was the ready duty of her daughter to the unkindness of her son. Elizabeth kissed her, and sate down beside her.

"Oh, it is a dreadful thing to find me here!" said the poor lady, looking sadly into her

daughter's face; "I thought to have spared you, or any one, the knowledge of my being here; but this solitude—this dismal place—and something of suffering beside, have broken my spirit. I could not live without feeling that I was loved—and I knew you would not fail me."

Both mother and daughter wept.

"You are surprised," continued she, after a pause, "to find me here. But do not ask me the cause; ask nothing from me; only let me see you sometimes; I want a kind face to look at. You would have come before, I am sure, if you had known what I have suffered."

"Dearest mother," returned Elizabeth, in a calm voice, "I have been with you before. I was with you through your worst suffering. I was your nurse—that young woman in the white cap, whom you thanked so gratefully."

Mrs. Durant put her hand into her daughter's without speaking; for the deepest emotion does not leave the power of fluent speech. And now all the kindness and thoughtfulness of that most tender of nurses was perfectly understood.

In a few seconds, thoughts which might have been the guiding principle of a life passed through her mind, and, falling on her daughter's neck, she kissed her, and wept tears of bitter self-condemnation.

CONCLUSION.

IF Richard inquired after the health of his mother, during her abode in the hospital, the knowledge of such inquiry never reached her; and she felt this supposed neglect as only another instance of unkindness. But she never complained of him: if she had not decreased in affection towards him, she at least had learned to rest upon the duty and love of her daughter.

It was but a few days after she had been removed to Elizabeth's lodgings at Richmond, when a young man, of remarkably prepossessing appearance, desired to have an interview with them. He was a stranger both to mother and daughter, and declined to give his name. His manners were very mild and gentlemanly, and he appeared to feel reluctance in stating his business. At length he said, Mr. Anthony Sharple had discovered that Mr. Richard Durant had not perished in the fire at Stanton-Combe. Mrs. Durant grew pale as death; but the stranger noticed it no further than by speaking in a tone yet more gentle.

"He was sorry," he said, "to state that a warrant was issued for his apprehension, under the name of Walker, the driver of a hackney-coach."

Elizabeth handed a glass of water to her mother, who she feared might faint, and apologized to the stranger, on the plea of her mother's late suffering.

"I am influenced," said their unknown friend, when Mrs. Durant again seemed able to hear

what further he had to say, "by the greatest possible kindness towards you, and even towards this unhappy young man; and, to confess the truth, have had repeated interviews with him."

"Pray, my dear sir," interrupted Mrs. Durant, "where is my unfortunate son?"

"He has sailed this very morning from Gravesend for Madras," answered the stranger.

A deep sigh escaped from the mother, in reply.

"I think I have done right," pursued the stranger; "the most remorseless pursuit would have dragged him from any concealment in this country. I had the means of knowing every step which the opposite party took. I was the only person who could save him. I have done it. I paid his passage, and he has gone from England well provided for; and has thus an opportunity of retrieving his character, and regaining, in some measure, his station in society. Let me know that I have done right."

The silent tears of Elizabeth and her mother were his answer.

"But may we not know to whom we are so greatly obliged?" asked Elizabeth, as the stranger took up his hat, as if about to depart.

"I doubt the favourable effect of my name," said he, half smiling; "I am the son of Sir Thomas Durant; permit me to hope that I have not forfeited your friendship!"

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